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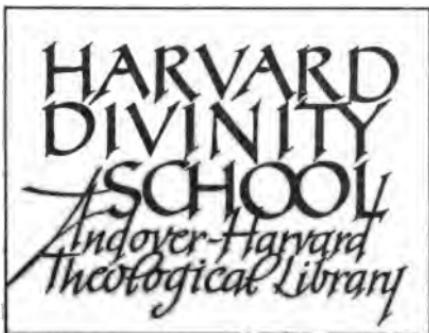
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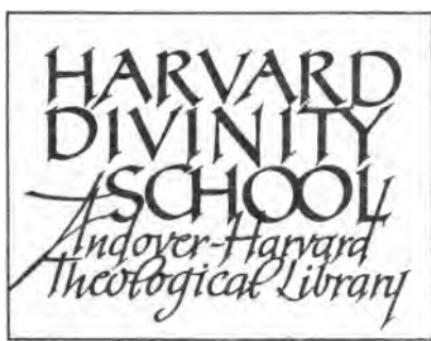


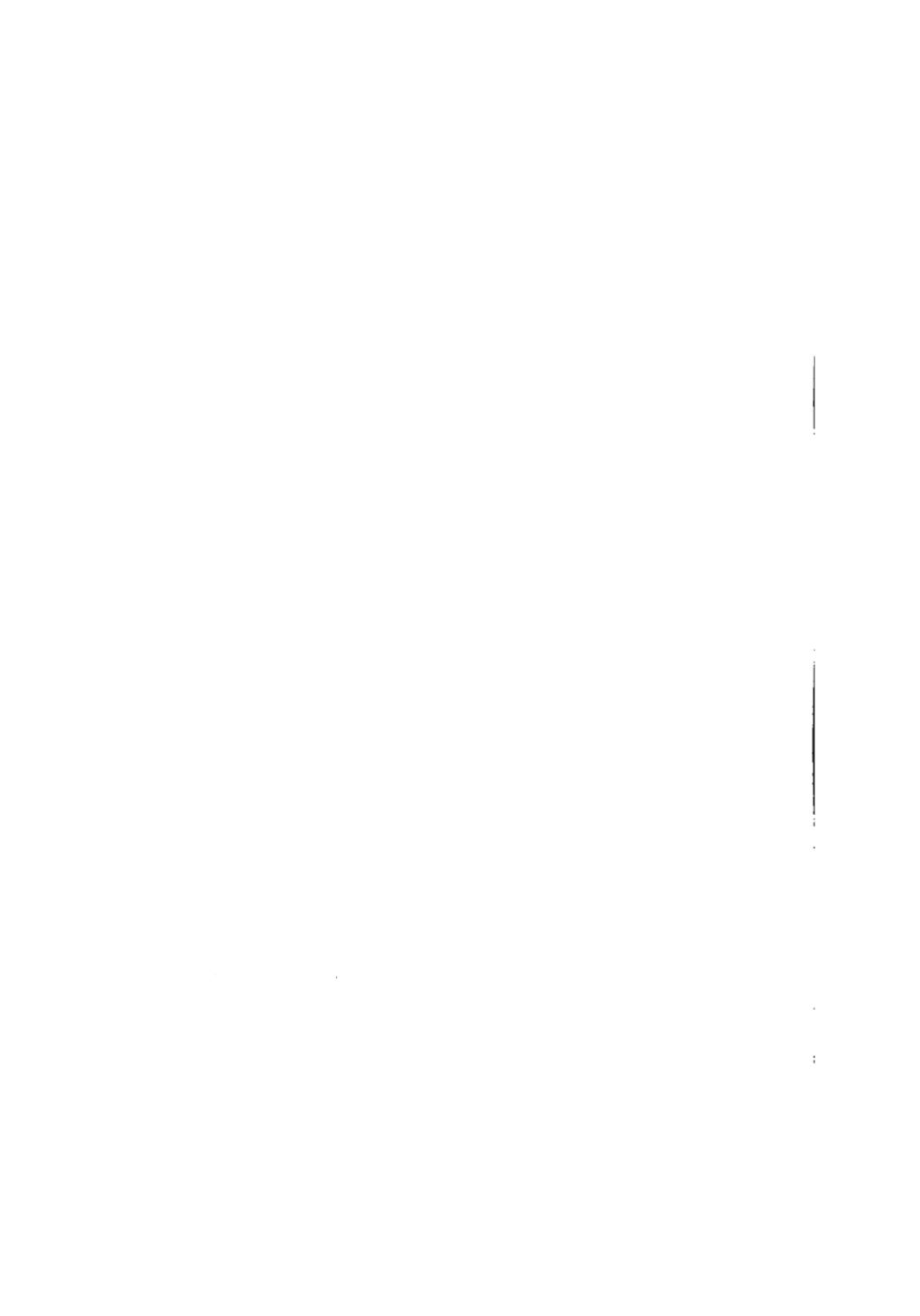






L I F E
OF
THE APOSTLE PETER.







L I F E
OR
THE APOSTLE PETER.

O ALMIGHTY God, who, by thy Son Jesus Christ,
didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excel-
lent gifts, and commandedst him earnestly to feed
thy flock; make, we beseech thee, all bishops and
pastors diligently to preach thy holy word, and the
people obediently to follow the same, that they may
receive the crown of everlasting glory, through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

◎

L I F E

OF

THE APOSTLE PETER.

IN

A SERIES OF PRACTICAL DISCOURSES.

BY

ALFRED LEE,

BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN DELAWARE.

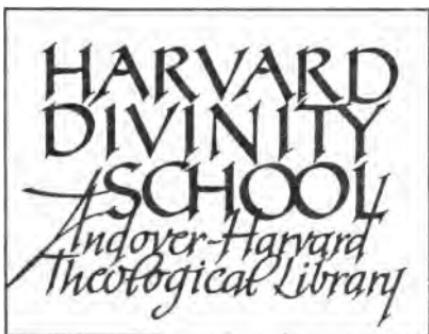
"The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee."

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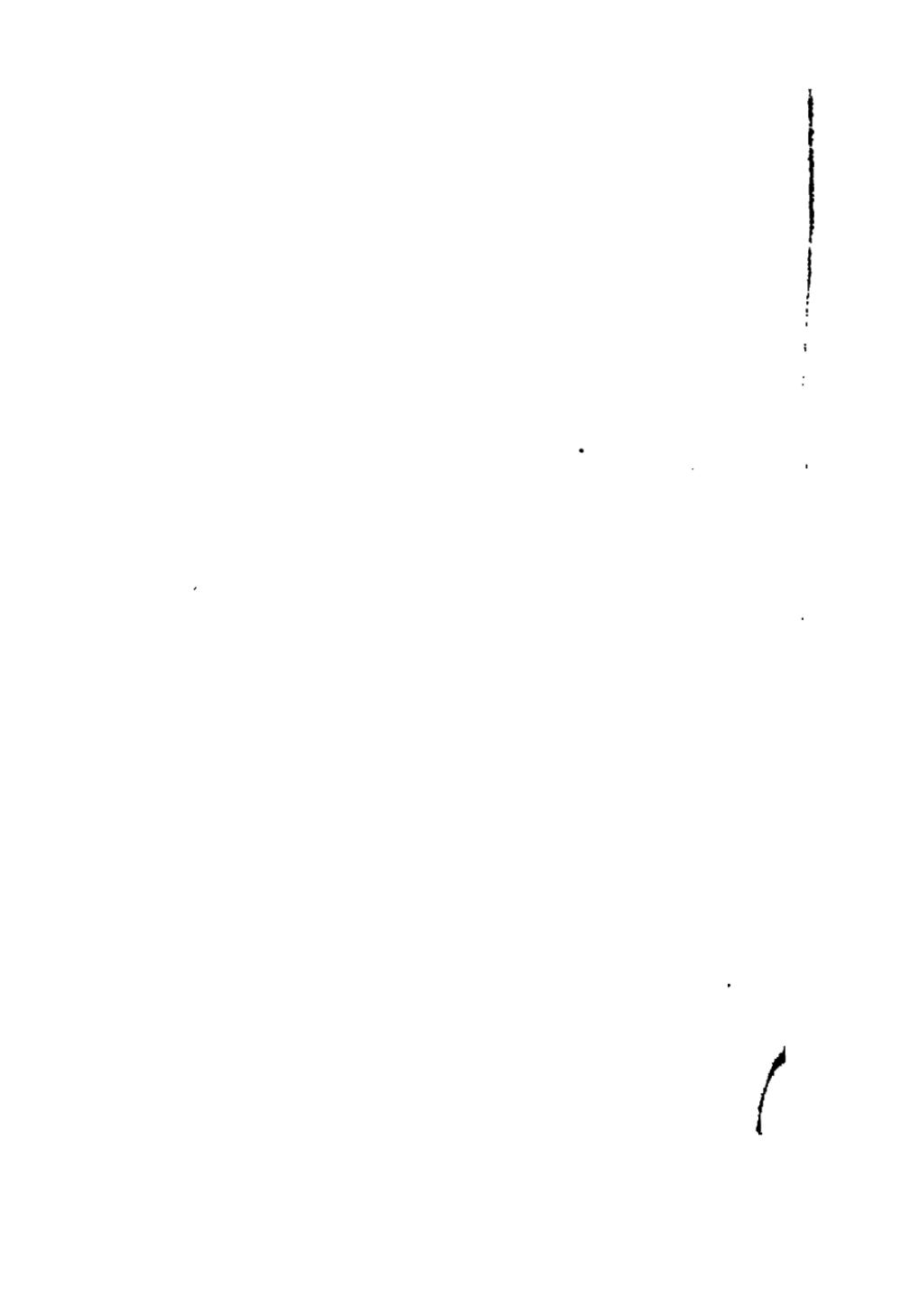
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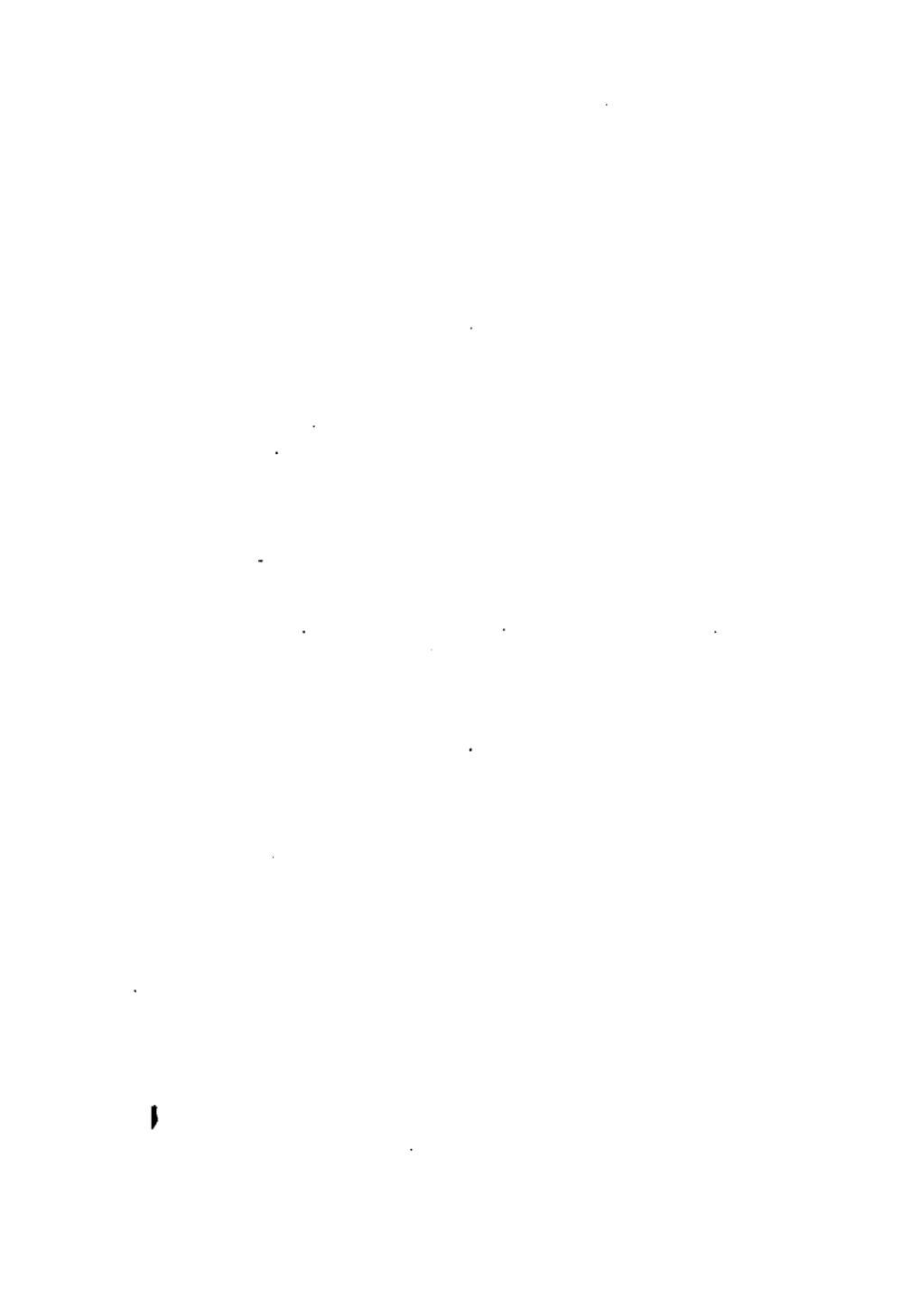
STANFORD AND SWORDS, 137, BROADWAY.

1852.



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L I F E
OR
THE APOSTLE PETER.

have remained unto this day." Where once stood those thronged and magnificent cities, the traveller now finds a few poor fisher-huts, amid scattered ruins. Impenitence will prove a blight and curse to city and land—it will prove destruction to a soul.

In one of these cities, (Bethsaida,) there dwelt at the time the Gospel history begins, the era of its wealth and glory, two brethren of humble parentage and obscure station. The sons of Jonas, Andrew and Simon, pursued with their father the calling of fishermen, and through the heats of summer and the storms of winter plied their nets upon the lake. Content with their daily bread and humble lot, and profoundly ignorant of the great things which God had in store for them, little did they suppose, little did their fellow-towns-men suppose, that Bethsaida would be chiefly memorable through future ages as their birth-place. The life and ministry of the most distinguished of these brethren, is our present subject. Not among the least interesting and edifying of Scripture teachings, are its characters and biographies. The sketches drawn in Holy Writ of the individuals most conspicuous and honored there, are full of instruction. The patriarch, the prophet, the apostle, the convert, tell us of the wonderful dealings of Jehovah, not only with their lips, but in their lives. Examples the most persuasive, lessons full

of divine wisdom, and events of thrilling interest constantly meet us in these attractive histories.

For more than forty years, it is supposed, had Simon been an unnoticed inhabitant of the cities of the lake, before the events occurred which changed his whole course of life, and drew him forth from his retirement to be a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. The general opinion of antiquity reckons him the oldest of the apostles, and we may ascribe to his age, as well as character, the fact of his name being placed foremost in the apostolic list. He had therefore fully attained middle life at the period at which he becomes known to us, and occupied with the support of his family, (for he was a married man,) his days glide away unmarked by stirring incident or great event. There seemed every prospect of his passing his whole life-time an obscure fisherman upon the sea of Galilee.

The first interruption of the even tenor of his days was probably the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Jordan, preaching repentance, and heralding the Messiah's approaching advent. For we find his brother Andrew introduced to us as a disciple and follower of John; and we may reasonably suppose that the two brethren were one in this beginning, as in the subsequent progress of their religious life. Peter there-

fore, we may conclude, was one of those awakened to repentance, by the pungent appeals of that bold and fervent preacher of righteousness. From the monotony of his life of labor, and the engrossing cares of his calling and his family, he is suddenly roused by "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." A new train of feelings would be thus awakened in his breast: other thoughts than those of his humble trade are stirred within him. He hears of the approach of a new, a spiritual kingdom. He is warned of the coming of One whose fan is in hand, who should thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner, but burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. New anxieties now engross him. His conscience responds to the energetic appeals of the Baptist. He thinks much and earnestly of this predicted kingdom. He dwells upon the thought of the expected Messiah whom John announces as near at hand. He begins to wait and watch for his appearing. Peter is no longer a mere fisherman, with a mind not rising above his nets and his boat. His conscience is awakened to some conviction of the evil of sin, and his soul is anxiously looking for the promised salvation. This view of Peter's state of mind best agrees, we think, with his ready welcome of Christ as soon as he was pointed out to him, and with his unhesitating obedience to his

call. Doubtless his views were at this period exceedingly narrow and confused. But he was a different man, after listening to John the Baptist, from what he had been before. This, we suppose, was the dawn of a higher and nobler life in his hitherto ignorant and carnal heart. What a momentous period is it in the history of the soul, when it first wakens to the earnest conception of some better portion than this world—when things divine and spiritual break in upon it as great realities—when it begins to feel its need of God—to confess the burden of sin, to sigh for pardon and peace, and to think much and seriously of eternity! How important the influences, which under God then act upon, and guide, and impel it! And what a blessing to the awakened and anxious spirit, when there is one at hand to cry like John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”

It was not Simon, however, but Andrew his brother, who was in company with the Baptist, when Jesus passed by, and was thus designated by his forerunner. Andrew, and his fellow disciple who heard him thus speak, instantly followed Jesus. “Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, what seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day; for

it was about the tenth hour." Thus the way was opened for Andrew to listen to the glad tidings from Jesus' lips. The evening was spent in holy converse with him whom he gladly recognized as the promised deliverer, the expected consolation of Israel. And when he left the abode of Jesus, he hastens to his brother with the exulting announcement, "We have found the Messias,"—"And he brought him to Jesus." How certainly, does the knowledge of Christ impel the happy soul to make him known to others, and to seek to bring them to his feet! Is it enough for Andrew to discover in Jesus of Nazareth the Lamb of God? Can he lock up the secret in his own breast? Can he rejoice over the discovery with a solitary, unsocial joy? No; his impulse is to communicate the blessing that he hath found—and especially to impart it to his own kindred. "He first findeth his own brother Simon." He hastens to him who had been his companion from youth, the child of his own parents, the sharer of his toils. He cannot rest until Simon also is partaker of his joy. Thus should it be always. The bonds of affection and sympathy are designed by God to issue in spiritual good. From mouth to mouth, and from heart to heart, is the assurance of the unspeakable treasure of a Saviour's love to be conveyed. If we have been enriched by Christ, it is not for ourselves alone, but that we may strive to make others rich.

And, especially, may we hope to be the Lord's instruments for blessing those who are linked with us in closest earthly bonds. Those appeals, which from a stranger might be coldly repelled, may sound more persuasive and inviting from the lips of brother, sister, parent, friend, husband or wife. And thus, in the providence of God, the true conversion and consistent piety of one member of a household, may prove the salvation of the rest. The heartfelt prayers of affection will be favorably answered, and Christian example will operate with constraining power. The spiritual welfare of the members of our own family circle should lie very near our hearts, and whatever may seem the opportunities, or the prospect of success, we should keep the object ever before us. Often there is more encouragement to such efforts than our own cold, sluggish, unbelieving hearts are willing to admit. At any rate, let religion occupy its proper place in our own souls, let Jesus be enshrined within, and his spirit be manifested in our lives, and we shall not live in vain. Some around us, some peradventure most precious and dear, will be ready to exclaim, "We will go with you, for God is with you of a truth."

In the case before us a blessing rested upon fraternal affection, and the great apostle, who afterward bore the standard of Christ from land to land, who opened the door of the kingdom to

Jews and Gentiles, was first brought to Jesus by a brother's hand.

The Saviour saluted him in a manner that showed his acquaintance with his past history, and his prophetic insight into his future destiny. "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: Thou shalt be called Cephas; which is, by interpretation, a stone." The full import of this new name, given him by the Saviour, (and which is preserved to us under the Greek form of Petros or Peter,) will be a more proper subject of consideration, when we come to that memorable confession of his Lord, whereupon it was again given to him with peculiar solemnity. That it does not denote, as the Church of Rome would pervert it, that this apostle should himself be the rock on which the Christian Church should be built, it may suffice now to confirm by quoting his own words, in his first epistle. "To whom," i. e. unto Christ, "coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up, a spiritual house. . . . Wherefore also it is contained in the Scriptures, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the cor-

ner." While there have been those therefore, who, by a wresting of Scripture, would make Peter the rock whereupon rests the Church of God, the apostle himself holds very different language, and assures us that Christ alone is that foundation on which the spiritual house is built. That Peter, in common with his brethren, the Apostles and Prophets, may be styled a foundation stone of the Church is not denied, but it is in a sense very different from that in which Christ is the foundation. To this our Saviour probably alluded, as also to the firm, unyielding character of him who should be afterwards so noted a champion of his faith.

The gospel history is silent as to the further particulars of this first interview between the disciple and his Lord. It suited not the needful brevity of the inspired writers to give us a full account of what then passed, or to describe to us the emotions of the Galilean fisherman upon beholding, face to face, Him for whose coming he had waited. With what measure of knowledge, and what degree of faith he now hailed his Saviour, we are not informed ; but there is reason to suppose that his knowledge was exceedingly limited and imperfect, and his faith as a grain of mustard seed. What the nature of the predicted kingdom, and what the deliverance to be wrought out by the Messiah, he scarce comprehended. Neither was he yet

aware of the close intimacy into which he should be brought with the Redeemer of Israel, as his daily companion and chosen apostle. He returns speedily to his wonted occupation on the lake. The necessity of providing for his household again engrosses his time, and when next presented to our notice, he is casting his net into the Sea of Gennessaret. But, in the mean time, the fame of Jesus has been extending, and the attention of the whole region is drawn to his miracles and his teachings. After his conflict with the tempter in the wilderness, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Gallilee; and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." And, after his ungrateful rejection by the inhabitants of Nazareth, he made the cities on the lake shore his ordinary residence, and the scene of his wondrous works. A new lustre now began to invest this portion of Palestine. Rich as was its soil, beautiful its scenery, flourishing its cities, the clouds of ignorance and sin had hitherto densely brooded over it. But now were fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah: "The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region of the shadow of death, light is sprung up." No matter what the

advantages of a land, however fertile, rich, flourishing, and desirable, if Christ be not known there, it is but "the region of the shadow of death." But now a day-spring from on high breaks gloriously upon this benighted province, and the gospel of salvation is proclaimed there by its Author's lips. We may well suppose that this coming of Jesus into their own country, and the growing interest which he awakened, was no matter of indifference to Peter and Andrew. They would be, doubtless, as often as their pressing avocations permitted, among the crowd that thronged around him. They would drink in eagerly his instructions in the synagogue, and gaze with astonishment and reverence upon his miracles of mercy. Their faith would be strengthening, and their attachment deepening. But they had not yet been summoned to leave all and follow him, and they continued still, in the eye of men, but poor fishermen of the lake.

But now arrives the important period of their call to a personal attendance upon Jesus, to an abandoning of every other concern and care, and an entire devotion of themselves to his service. As they were sitting in their boat, after a night of unsuccessful toil, the revered teacher of Galilee appears on the lake shore, followed by the eager multitudes who now always thronged his steps. "And he entered into one of the ships, which was

Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship." From this rude pulpit, discoursed with the deeply interested crowd he who spake as never man spake. His speech dropped as the rain, his doctrine distilled as the dew, and, amid prevailing stupidity and hardness of heart, there were doubtless many souls into which penetrated the healing and saving influence of the life-giving word. And we may reasonably suppose that there would be that in his subject peculiarly adapted to his companions in the boat, and the unexpected summons which he was about to give them.

The account of the call of these apostles to close attendance upon their Lord, is an illustration of the manner in which the four gospels illustrate and complete each other, one supplying what another omits; so that the four, being interwoven, furnish us with a complete and perfect narrative. In the gospels of Matthew and Mark we find merely this brief statement: "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed him." From these Evangelists we learn nothing of the previous history of these

brethren. We should not know that they had ever been disciples of John Baptist, or that they enjoyed any previous acquaintance with Jesus. We learn nothing of the special miracle which accompanied and enforced this call. But these important links in the chain of the history are supplied by John and Luke. It was not a mere stranger, an unknown person, who called to them from the lake shore, and bade them follow him. It was not a sudden miraculous impression on their minds that induced them immediately to obey a voice before unheard. The Lord's power doubtless would have been sufficient to produce such an effect, but his procedure was, in reality, more in accordance with his ordinary methods of working. These disciples had been growing in the knowledge of^r the Lord Jesus Christ. . Light had been dawning upon them with advancing brightness, and, by its gradual increase, they had been prepared to receive and welcome the summons to forsake all for his sake. In the fuller narrative of St. Luke, we read : " Now, when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing ; nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes ; and their net brake.

And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him." This miracle of Christ was fitted to strike most powerfully the minds of the Galilean fishermen. In these same waters they had just spent a whole night in unrewarded labor. This very portion of the lake had been swept again and again, but their nets still came up empty. Now, at the word of the wonderful teacher, these same waters swarm with life, and the finny tenants of the deep own his presence, and flock into the net. What manner of man is this? All that moves in the sea heeds his voice, and confesses his might. Astonishment seizes the humble spectators of this stupendous miracle. And, with this astonishment, is mingled in Simon's breast an overwhelming sense of his own defilement as a sinner. Oppressed with convictions of past guilt, flashing like lightning upon his troubled soul, he cannot bear this awful presence of a being so holy.

He recognizes in Jesus more than man; he sees the outstretched arm of Jehovah confirming his word; and he trembles to think that one so unworthy as himself should be thus visited. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." "I am undeserving of thy holy presence. I shrink from thy pure contact. I am a miserable, wretched sinner, and what can I expect at thy hand but deserved punishment."

The manifestation of Christ to the soul is always attended with the discovery of its own guilt. And though he makes himself known not in wrath, but in love, yet will his bright presence illuminate the dark recesses of the bosom, and unveil to our startled view hidden things of wickedness. If we have never been humbled before God, as self-condemned sinners, we do not yet know Christ. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." The first impulse of the awakened soul is often to bid Christ remove,— "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." We shrink from the light of his countenance. We would escape these piercing convictions of defilement and unholiness. We dread the scrutiny of those searching eyes; we would regain, by shunning them, our former composure and peace. But woe unto us, if Christ depart at our bidding. No! let us rather welcome the revealing beams of his divine light. Let us welcome the Lord himself to /

our hearts, though he come to humble us and to prove us, to cast us down in the dust, to break up our false peace, to bring low our high imaginations, to drive us from our refuges of lies, to constrain us to cry, from the depth of our souls, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Not only, we gather from this passage, does Jesus manifest himself to the souls of all his people as a searcher of the heart, a detector and reprover of sin, a messenger of repentance in order to peace; but especially will this be so to those whom he designs to call to his ministry. "Wo is me!" exclaims the prophet Isaiah, "for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." And then is heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And the prophet, just before so overwhelmed with confusion, answers, "Here am I; send me." "Seeing we have this ministry," says the apostle Paul, "as we have received mercy, we faint not." It is mercy received that impels Christ's ministers to proclaim that mercy, and sustains them that they faint not. The pardoned sinner is the man to plead with sinners. And the sincerity, the earnestness, the faithfulness of the Lord's ambassadors will greatly correspond with their estimate

of the magnitude of their own debt to pardoning mercy and almighty love.

Thus the Lord answers to the trembling Simon, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." "Forsaking thy business on the lake, thou shalt be engaged, soul and body, in a work, which thy former craft fitly symbolizes, but which is unspeakably more elevated. Thou shalt let down the gospel net. Thou shalt gather immortal souls within its sacred meshes. Men shall be henceforth thy nobler prey. Thou shalt seek them not to destroy, but to save and bless." How signally this promise was fulfilled, the after life of the great apostle is the well-known proof. The miracle of Jesus on the lake had shown, that when he bids cast the net, it shall not come up empty. And when Peter first stood boldly forth, and preached the gospel of a risen Saviour on the day of Pentecost, there was indeed enclosed in the net a multitude, which well corresponded with the miraculous draught of fishes, at the time of the Apostle's call.

We cannot hope, under the altered circumstances of the Church, for such ingatherings as made Pentecost memorable. But still the work is the same, and its ministers only enter upon it from their faith in the assurance, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Many indeed are our seasons of seemingly fruitless labor. Often

are we tempted to discouragement, and ready are we to answer to our Lord, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." "Sabbath after Sabbath is spent in exhausting labor, sermon after sermon is preached, appeal follows appeal, invitations and warnings succeed each other, and we witness no apparent fruit of our labors. No new enquirers ask the way of salvation. No fresh converts confess thee to be Lord and Christ. No additional guests approach the heavenly feast. Lord, who hath believed our report, and unto whom is the arm of the Lord revealed. "The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and many for whose souls we watch are not saved." But still we hear the command, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." "Preach the word—be instant in season, out of season—reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine." "Be not weary in welldoing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not." And thus encouraged, we again cast the net. We labor hopefully. We deliver the message, and commit the result to God. And, peradventure, at the very time when we were most ready to despair, the blessing comes. The net which we cast into the sea with doubting, desponding hearts, is drawn to land richly filled. "Lord, at thy word I will again let down the net," and if one undying soul, one heir of immortality, one probationer for

eternity be now brought within the sweet influence of gospel grace, and embrace with real penitence and humble faith the gospel promise ; if another jewel be now added to Immanuel's crown ; another brand rescued from the burning ; another trophy won to the great Redeemer ; how richly is all our labor overpaid, how does the costly recompense exceed all that we could ask or think !

THE WALK UPON THE WATERS.

MATT. XIV. 30.

"But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid: and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me."

We have briefly noticed the early life of the Apostle Peter, and that memorable interruption of its tranquil course, the call of the Lord Jesus Christ to the fisherman of the lake to forsake all and follow him. Henceforth Simon is another man, and his history is closely connected with that of the religion which must overspread the world and that of its great founder. He is now the constant companion, the inseparable follower of the Lord Jesus. Except at his Lord's hours of devotional retirement, or when sent by him on some special mission, he is never absent from his side. How blessed a privilege must this have been, this daily communion, this unbroken fellowship with Jesus, the privilege of hearkening to his gracious words, of witnessing his astonishing miracles, of proposing to him with freedom doubts and perplexities, of receiving his affectionate rebukes and counsels, of beholding the beauty of holiness in his daily life and conversation. Are we ready to envy the favored disciple his close and confiden-

tial intercourse with the Word made flesh? Are we ready to say, as the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon: "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom." Do we think that we should have gladly shared the Redeemer's penury and privations, to have had this intimate companionship with one so benevolent and compassionate, so full of heavenly wisdom, so meek and lowly, yet so wondrous and divine? We can test the sincerity of such wishes. Do we love to be with Jesus now? To be with him in the closet, availing ourselves of his gracious offers to lead us to the throne of the heavenly grace? Do we gladly commune with him in those scriptures, from which he still addresses us in solemn heart-affecting words? Do we love to be with him in the sanctuary, where he is in the midst of two or three gathered in his name, and at the holy table where he dispenses heavenly food to the penitent and believing? Unless we have a heart to improve these precious means of converse with that Saviour who is still present to faith, we do but deceive ourselves in supposing that we should have forsaken all, with Peter and his fellow disciples, to follow his daily journeyings and hang upon his lips.

The evangelists unite to assure us that the disciples, at the Savior's call, forsook all to follow him; and we find Peter himself afterwards ap-

pealing to his Lord as a witness of the reality of this abandonment. "Lo! we have forsaken all, and followed thee, what shall we have therefor?" But from one of the first miracles performed by the Lord after Peter's call, we gather that this requirement did not involve any unnecessary disruption of the ordinary ties of domestic life. The relations of kindred and family were broken in upon, only so far as was necessary to the carrying out of the great object of the Apostolic mission. It seems to have been immediately after the summons of the brethren from their fishing boats, that the Lord spent a sabbath in Capernaum, occupied in his usual work of publishing his gospel, and ministering to the afflicted. In this city Peter was now residing. But there was one member of his family, whom grievous sickness shut out from the place of assembly. "Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her." Those longing souls, whom the providence of God, and not their own neglect, debars from attendance on public ordinances, who cannot come to meet Jesus in the sanctuary, Jesus will visit in their own homes. "He stood over her and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them." At his word of power, not only did the sickness depart, but the full vigor of health instantaneously returned. No lengthened period of gradual con-

valescence succeeded the disease, in its nature so prostrating, but she was enabled at once to rise up from her couch with renovated strength and perfect health, and to render the duties of hospitality to her guests. Thus was the supernatural character of the cure made more strikingly evident. And it must have proved an exceeding encouragement to Peter to find the power of that master whom he had just begun to follow, at once so unbounded, and so freely exerted for the relief of the suffering members of his servants' households. It seemed to promise that none of those dependant on Christ's disciples should be losers by their attachment to him. He condescended to enter as a guest beneath the humblest roof of those that loved him, and wherever he came blessings entered with him.

This incident is important in another bearing. One of the marked features of that corrupt Church, whose Papal head professes to be Peter's successor, is the discountenancing, in those of its members who claim to be holiest and most unworldly, and especially forbidding to its clergy, the formation of domestic ties. An enforced celibacy shuts those, who devote themselves in this calling to the service of God, from the endearments of home, and the benign and hallowed influences that cluster around the Christian family. No surer plan could be devised of building up a great spiritual

despotism, and of fastening a yoke upon the souls of men, than this separation of a priesthood from all the sympathies of domestic life, cutting them off from the softening influences of affection, and combining them in one compactly marshalled host, without individual will, or interest, or motive, ready to execute with implicit submission the behests of a supreme earthly authority. Most mighty is this instrumentality for the object of lording it over God's heritage, and erecting and maintaining an immense fabric of ecclesiastical domination. Thus is formed a sacerdotal caste, separated by an immense gulf from the great body of the people, whose whole aim and influence will be their own aggrandizement. I pause not now to dwell upon the amazing evils that have always resulted from this abuse. But this part of the history of the Apostle Peter reminds us that the evangelists have left, as it were, their protest against it, in making us specially acquainted with the fact, that the man whom Rome exalts to a supremacy above all the Apostles, was a husband and the head of a family. That he continued to sustain these relations, after entering upon his apostolic work, is shown by the assertion of St. Paul, that he himself had the right, although he did not choose to exercise it, of forming a conjugal connection, and of being accompanied by his wife on his missionary journeyings, as well as his fellow-Apostles,

naming particularly the subject of our present remarks. "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other Apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Is it not the finger of God that hath preserved these notices of this Apostle's domestic history, immaterial as they might at first have appeared, and yet rendered very important by the subsequent rise and anti-Christian errors of the great Apostacy?

The time now arrived in which it seemed good to the Lord, solemnly to designate a certain number of his followers to a great office and work in his kingdom. But before he proceeded to invest them with this weighty charge, it is written, that "He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." That was a night to be remembered by the Church of the redeemed. With what intense fervor of supplication did the Lord Jesus pour forth his soul during those hours of darkness! Not the twelve Apostles alone were embraced in those warm petitions. He was about to constitute his ministry, to commission and send forth those who were to make known the riches of his grace to a dying world. Their sound should go out into all the world, and their words unto the ends of the earth. The work was not to cease when these, its pioneers, should have finished their course, and gone to their reward. The sacred trust now committed to them

was to be handed down from age to age, from generation to generation. It is to the prayers of that solemn night that we now owe a living ministry, and all the blessing that rests upon that ministry's labors, for time and for eternity. When Jesus saw the fainting multitudes scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd, he was moved with compassion on them, and said unto his disciples, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." Now he was himself engaged in praying the Lord of the harvest for this great object. And what need of such fervent effectual prayer as Christ then offered! How vast the work—how feeble the instruments! How costly the treasure of the everlasting Gospel! How frail the earthen vessels in which it is lodged! What amazing and far-reaching results hang upon this work, and its right discharge! The glory of the triune God; the carrying out the great object of the Redeemer's incarnation, suffering and death; the spreading of that knowledge of salvation which is life from the dead; the eternal destiny of crowding myriads of undying souls, all are involved in this ministry of reconciliation—all press upon the anxious heart of the supplicating Saviour—all impel him to a fervor, and intensity, and perseverance of petition that knows not how to pause. The dawning day, with its appropriate labors, can alone arrest his earnest wrestlings with

the Father for rich and abiding blessings upon his ministers, his Church, his people, to the end of the world. Thank God, ye that hear the joyful sound, whom the Son hath made free indeed from the dominion of sin and the burden of the curse, thank God, for that night of prayer!

Shall we not also gather from this account the connection, established by God, between fervent prayer, and the success of the ministry. That it should prove indeed a ministry of reconciliation, it needs to be sent forth with prayer, and to be sustained by prayer. And let those who complain of want of unction and aptness in ministers, and of want of profit to their souls, answer whether they have borne their pastors on their hearts before the mercy-seat, and faithfully entreated God's abundant grace to descend upon their labors.

"And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve whom also he named Apostles." The word signifies literally messengers or missionaries, persons sent forth for a specific object. Saint Mark tells us, "he calleth unto him whom he would." Christ has the choice of his ministers. He has never relinquished it, and the outward commission given by the Church is but her seal or attestation to the supposed previous call of Christ to the soul. "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and min-

istration?" is the question that must be answered, honestly, and in the presence of a heart-searching God, by those who apply for permission to minister in holy things.

The selection of the Apostles, (at first twelve in number, corresponding with the twelve tribes of Israel,) has been always considered among the decisive evidences of the divine origin of the Gospel. They were not such men as human policy would choose for the establishment of a new religion, and the effecting of a great moral revolution. They were not trained in the schools of philosophy, they were unacquainted with the arts of statesmen, they were without learning, eloquence and subtlety. There was nothing in their appearance and manner to make a favorable impression upon the mass of men. On the contrary, all these things were against them. These Galilean fishermen appeared the most unlikely instruments that could be employed. "But God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ; that no flesh should glory in his presence." Thus was it manifest that the excellency of the power was of God and not of man. There can be no escape from

the conclusion that these men, so deficient in what would seem to human judgment needful for their work, must have been furnished with other weapons for their warfare, even with those miraculous powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost, which made them able to cope with the powers of darkness and the hostility of the world ; and that it was the arm of the Lord, working with them, which made them every where to triumph in Christ. "He ordained twelve," says St. Mark, "that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." Here are presented to us their preparation for their work, companionship with Jesus : the work itself, to preach or evangelize ; they were to be eminently the world's evangelists : and their qualification, miraculous gifts and powers.

In this venerable Apostolic list, the name placed first is that of Peter. That this circumstance does not imply any primacy or supremacy on his part, over his brethren, is manifest from conclusive reasons to which we shall hereafter have occasion to advert. That he was a favored apostle, the Saviour's choice of him, together with James and John, on more than one very important occasion, to be with him, is an undeniable proof. His being first named in the catalogue, was probably as well owing to these marks of

favor, as to his advantage in years, or his being first named to the office by Christ, and also to the peculiar zeal and forwardness of his character. His fervent spirit impelled him constantly to the front rank. Affectionately attached to his Lord, he was never backward in testifying that attachment. He was always ready to answer, to venture and to promise. Not unfrequently he received severe rebukes of his self-confidence and rashness. But his bold and ardent temperament, sanctified by divine grace, made him a most earnest and devoted disciple of Christ, and well accounts for the conspicuous position which he occupies among his brethren. Of these interesting traits of character we are soon furnished with a marked instance. It was on the evening of a day, noted for one of Christ's most astonishing miracles, the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, that Jesus constrained his disciples to embark in a little vessel, and go before him to the other side of the lake. The language of the sacred writer seems to intimate an unwillingness on their part at this time to leave him. "He *constrained* them to get into a ship." The necessity of using this constraint was probably their sympathy with the ambitious projects of the multitude. Astonished by this exercise of his power, and perceiving how easily it could overbear every obstacle or enemy, they were bent on placing him at once on

the throne. "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone." But before he sought this retirement, he insisted that his disciples, too much inclined to favor the scheme, should depart from the place. It was long before they could understand that his kingdom was not of this world; and that they who shall reign with him, must first suffer with him. Darkness overtakes the disciples on the lake, and with the darkness comes tempest and danger. "The sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." The storm met them on their way and directly opposed their course, and vainly do they attempt by laboring at their oars to make head against it. Hour after hour is spent in fruitless toil. They are now in the midst of the agitated lake, the fury of the tempest increases, and the danger grows more imminent. Are they forgotten in their extremity by their absent Lord, and will he, who has so often exercised an apparently resistless power, will he now leave them to perish? Such might have been their fears and complaints. Such is the prompting of our unbelieving hearts, when we are tossed upon life's stormy sea, when all is dark around us, when the winds are let loose, and the billows rage and swell, when destruction threatens us, and we seem to find no Saviour at our side. But let the account of that

wild night's voyage comfort the agitated soul in similar extremity. The disciples were indeed in the midst of the tempest on the open sea. But who had sent them there? Was it not their Master's word which bade them embark, nay, which insisted upon it? And was he ignorant of what was in store for them? Saw he not the approaching storm? Knew he not how soon they would be tossed upon the wave, and be even at their wit's end? And was he now unmindful of their peril? Although on the lone mountain summit—could he not observe his struggling disciples buffeting the storm, and were they not even then safe in the hollow of his hand?

The way in which Christ sends us, may lead into trouble, danger, and dismay. The driving tempest and the raging waves may encounter us, when we have embarked at his bidding. The course of duty may require us to launch out into the agitated sea, when we would fain linger in the quiet harbor. But be it so: still obedience is our happiness and safety. Christ may send his followers into the midst of the tempest, but he will not forget or forsake them. Though he seem far distant upon the mount, yet are they not forgotten in his intercessions. In all their afflictions he is afflicted, and, in his own time, he will interpose for their deliverance and assure their safety. Ye that are tossed by the tempest and driven be-

fore the blast, doubt not, neither despair, because hour after hour, and watch after watch passeth, and Jesus appears not. In patience possess ye your souls, and when the fourth watch cometh, if not before, the Redeemer will draw nigh. But when Christ appeareth to his fainting and troubled followers, they do not always recognize and welcome him. "And about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out. For they all saw him, and were troubled." Can we be surprised at their consternation? Think of the wild night—the fierce wind, the boiling sea, the imminent peril of the boatmen. And over the summit of those restless waves is seen, approaching in the dim light, an indistinct and shadowy form. Can it be aught mortal that wanders in such unearthly guise, and at such an hour, over the surface of the stormy lake? That conviction deep-seated in the breast of man, everywhere, and under all circumstances, which the sceptic may deride, but which he no less certainly feels—that conviction of the existence of a spiritual world, and of unearthly beings, bursts from them in an involuntary cry of terror. They suppose it to be an apparition, and to their excited imaginations it might

seem the spirit of the storm, come to mock and destroy them.

Wherefore should the idea of the appearance of a spiritual being prove so awful to the mind? Why does superstition shrink and cower before the imaginary beings with whom it peoples the darkness? And why, admitting the reality of such an interposition, need it be accompanied, as in the vision described by Eliphaz, by fear and trembling, making all the bones to shake, and the hair of the flesh to stand up? Sin is the true cause of this undefinable terror. Conscience makes cowards of men, and guilt converts the supposed visitant from another world into a fearful spectre. This horror, be it causeless or real, is one among the many proofs that our souls, unreconciled to God, are not at peace.

But if the form terrified the disciples, the voice speedily reassured them. That voice which speaks peace and comfort to all, *but the impenitent*, sounds above the roaring of the tempest. "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid." Cheering indeed must have been those familiar sounds to the affrighted company. Sweet is the voice of the good shepherd to his flock under all circumstances, but how inexpressibly comforting in the darkness of sorrow or despair, amid the howling of the storm and the dashing of the billows! Transported with the glad assurance of his master's presence,

the warm hearted Peter cannot restrain his impatience to be with him. "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." "To thee who walkest upon the waves of the sea nothing is impossible. Summon me to thy side, and I will not hesitate to cast myself into the raging element, confident in thy power to sustain and save." "And he said, Come." The Saviour complied at once with the request, rash and presumptuous as it was; for the affection which prompted it was acceptable in his sight, and he would moreover teach his disciple by a most impressive lesson in whom he must place his trust. "And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus." The yielding, treacherous element became like a solid pavement under his feet, and he strangely trod upon the uncertain waves. And while he looked towards his Lord, with a single eye and a confiding heart, he sank not. But soon his attention is drawn to his strange and fearful venture, such as no mere man before him had ever tried. He looks away from the Saviour to the danger, and then his support fails. "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid: and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me."

"Lo," saith Bishop Hall, "Peter is walking upon the waves. Two hands uphold him, the hand of Christ's power, the hand of his own faith; neither

of them would do it alone. The hand of Christ's power laid hold on him, the hand of his faith laid hold on the power of Christ. Had not Christ's hand been powerful, that faith had been in vain ; had not that faith of his been strongly fixed upon Christ, that power had not been effectual to his preservation. While we are here in the world we walk upon the waters ; still the same hands bear us up. If he let go his hold of us, we drown ; if we let go our hold of him, we sink and shriek as Peter did ; so soon as he began to fear, he began to sink. While he believed, the sea was brass ; when once he began to distrust, those waves were water."

But though Peter's faith wavered, it was real, and when he felt himself going down into the depth of the sea, it fastened upon him who is mighty to save. "Lord, save me," bursts from the sinking disciple. And it was enough. Those three short words, from the bottom of the heart, are words of power. They move the hand that moves the world. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased."

Christian, your life of faith is a walk upon the waters. To your native powers it is as impracticable, as would be the attempt to tread upon the surface of the sea. You must walk by

faith, not by sight. Let your eye be single, fixed upon Jesus. Though the sea on which you move heave and swell, though there be commotion all around you, and unfathomable depths beneath, yet look unto Jesus in faith and prayer, and you shall not sink. Or, if your courage give way, and you seem to be going down into the abyss, cry with sinking Peter, "Lord, save me," and the same hand will be outstretched for your relief. "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish." Nay, though there seem to approach you over the troubled waves a spectral form, dreadful and threatening as the king of terrors, yet shall your fears be calmed, and your soul strengthened in that hour by the well known voice, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

Sinner, you too may recognize in the condition of the sinking Peter, a lively image of your own peril. You are cast out upon a storm-lashed sea. You are in danger of being engulfed amid raging waves. No shipwrecked struggling wretch was ever in greater peril, than your undying soul. Your own strength cannot sustain you, and except speedy succor come, you sink deeper than ever plummet sounded. There is but one hand that can snatch you from this jeopardy. He, who hearkened to the cry of his drowning apostle, is even now with you on the deep. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. His arm is not short-

ened that it cannot save. Shall your cry go up into his open ear? Shall your faith clasp his outstretched hand? Shall you prove his power to save? Or, slighting his offered help, shall you go down into the abyss? God forbid!

THE GOOD CONFESSION.

MATT. XVI. 17, 18.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou,—Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

THIS passage of holy writ deserves special attention, in view of the strange perversions that have been put upon it, and the unwarrantable inferences deduced therefrom. We may be well amazed at the abuse to which it has been subjected. The enormous structure of Papal despotism is ostensibly erected upon this foundation,—and these few words embody the main strength of the claim that is made upon the whole body of Christians, to bow their necks to a yoke of intolerable bondage. The perversion which this passage has undergone, as well as its real importance in the life of the Apostle Peter, claim for it more than ordinary attention.

The words of the text were spoken by the Lord in recompence of Peter's memorable confession of his Messiahship and Divinity. Neither was this the first time that the Apostle had ex-

pressed his decided conviction of these sublime and all-important truths. Not very long before, he had declared with equal fervor and boldness, in the very same words, his faith in his Saviour. The first occasion of his making this good confession, was at a time when many of Christ's disciples took offence at his discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum, and deserted his cause. The Lord had testified to them the necessity, in order to everlasting salvation, of faith in his sacrificial death and atonement for sin, under the figure of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. A multitude who had been attracted chiefly by his miracles, instead of humbly inquiring into the meaning of this emblematic, and to their minds obscure and revolting language, chose to take offence, and make it an excuse for leaving him. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." This was truly a noble expression of faith in a despised and deserted Saviour. Genuine affection, reverence and trust gush freely and warmly from the Apostle's heart. The abandonment of his Lord by so many temporary adherents, only serves to draw this devoted

follower more closely to his side. He breaks forth into more earnest and reverential acknowledgements of his Master's exalted character, in this season of depression, than when he was attended by admiring thousands. He professes his confidence in his real Sonship and Christly office, and in his exclusive possession of the words of eternal life. He touchingly appeals to his Master himself—"Lord, to whom shall we go?" "If we forsake thee, whither shall we turn? Who else hath a power so unbounded, a doctrine so divine? Who can speak to us as thou dost of heavenly things, and direct us in the way of immortality and life?" Grateful to the Saviour's heart, we cannot doubt, was this prompt and heartfelt confession of his claims, and though at the time he uttered no approving answer, yet it must have been in his mind when he gave so remarkable a promise to his Apostle, on the subsequent repetition of his firm belief.

Would that all who are tempted to draw back from a Saviour, whom they have once pledged themselves to follow, might lay to heart the Apostle's answer, when his Lord so affectingly asked, "Will ye also go away?" "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Whither shall they betake themselves who abandon Jesus? There may be trials and difficulties in his service. The way of obedience, you argue, seems rough and forbidding. The cross to

be taken up is heavy—the saying of Jesus is hard. Grant it all. But to whom will you go? He hath “the words of eternal life.” He and he alone. He is himself “The Way, the Truth, and the Life.” What other master promises to the sinner, pardon; to the alien, peace with God; to the impotent, strength; to the tempted, grace; to the dying, immortality? And if you desert him, where in the wide universe is the being who can save your soul from death, and shelter you from the wrath to come? We care not now to gainsay and refute the objections that are made by the sin-loving, worldly heart, against his pure doctrine and his holy service. Let it be so. Suppose that his ways, instead of being pleasantness and peace, are toilsome and rough. Grant that his yoke is not easy, neither his burden light. Suppose all the false accusations of his enemies against his religion to be correct; and still the question recurs,—recurs with undiminished force and power—to whom beside will you go? He hath the words of eternal life. For you as an accountable being, as a sinner, as destined to judgment, as an heir of eternity, there is but one recourse, one Saviour, one hope. And if you forsake Jesus, you draw back unto inevitable perdition.

The subsequent repetition of his faith by the Apostle Peter, was in answer to the question of his Lord, respecting the impressions that prevailed

as to his character. "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" After their reply, stating the different opinions that were maintained, all agreeing in attributing to Jesus an unusual and prophetic character, he puts a second question directly to themselves: "But whom say ye that I am?" The same fervor and affection that impelled Peter to be forward on other occasions, manifested themselves now. But he spake not for himself alone, but for his brethren. "Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Thou art the promised Messiah, the long-expected consolation of Israel; and not only so, thou art the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, the Word, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." In answer to this prompt and noble acknowledgment, as an evidence how acceptable and precious is such faith in his sight, the Lord uttered the words that have been the occasion of so much abuse and so much controversy, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, (son of Jonas,) for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and

whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." My chief difficulty in the present treatment of this passage, is to compress, within the limited space of a single discourse, a satisfactory view of the questions that have arisen from it. Before giving what I conceive to be the true meaning of the text, I will refer to the Romish interpretation, and to the consequences that have been attached thereto. It is briefly this :—

1. The rock on which the Christian Church is built is Peter.
2. The words of Christ conferred on Peter a supremacy over his brethren, and over the whole Church. The grant of the keys invested him with an infallible judgment in doctrine, an authority final and without appeal in all controversies of faith, a supreme lordship over all matters ecclesiastical, an authority to remit or retain sins, and constituted him the vicar or representative of Christ on earth, with powers equal to those that the Saviour would have if personally present.*
3. This power, in all its plenitude, was to continue to the end of time in Peter's successors.
4. The Popes, or Bishops of Rome, are Peter's successors.
5. The Romish Church is therefore THE CHURCH to which the promise applies, that the gates of hell

* Barrow on the Pope's Supremacy, &c., &c.

shall not prevail. It is therefore the infallible depository of the truth; is guarded from all possibility of defection or error; and all men to whom sufficient light is given are bound to connect themselves with it, under peril of eternal damnation.

Thus, you perceive, the consequence of this long and monstrous deduction is a practical matter. A claim derived therefrom is addressed to every soul, requiring under the most dreadful of all penalties, immediate and entire submission to an amazing system of spiritual despotism. And this claim is urged with so much speciousness, artfulness and boldness, as to beguile multitudes of unstable souls, and to lead many even who have known the way of truth to make shipwreck of their faith. It is evident that in this chain link is fastened to link—of this edifice, stone is piled upon stone. If but a single link be severed, the chain is broken. If one stone be removed, the whole proud Babel crumbles to the dust. Now, in point of truth, not one link alone, but all the links can be broken. Each of them is weak and unsound, and cannot bear examination. But if one be severed, it is enough for our cause. So that if Peter be not the rock on which the Church is built; or if his being made a rock, by no means makes him the Supreme and Infallible Head of the Church; or if the power or privilege, whatever it was, that was conferred upon him was altogether personal,

and not to descend to successors ; or if the Bishops of Rome are not his successors ; if either of these points be established, then the whole edifice falls to the ground. The Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, is *not Rome*, and submission to her usurpations, and participation in her idolatries, so far from being a duty, may be, and, as we gather from many parts of Scripture, is a very grievous sin, a most perilous delusion. I advert briefly to these points in order.

1. Is Peter the Rock on which the Church is built ? Many of the most learned interpreters, and those not merely moderns, but some of the most esteemed of the ancient fathers who lived before the period of Romish usurpation, and who knew nothing of the disputes that should arise from this passage, understand by the rock here, *the confession of faith* which Peter had just made. “Upon this great truth, this confession of my Messiahship and Divinity, shall my Church be reared.” And the favorers of this interpretation observe that although Peter or “*Petros*” signify a stone : yet Christ here uses another word, “*Petra*,” denoting a solid and immovable rock. This opinion is entitled to great respect from the character of those who have held it, among whom was St. Chrysostom*. But what if we admit that as the pro-

* “This sense even Popes have embraced.” Barrow—p. 97.

mise was made to Peter, as a recompense for his zeal and faith, he may be intended? In what sense, can Peter be the foundation? Certainly in the same sense in which all the Apostles are elsewhere so designated. As in the Epistle to the Ephesians, Christians are said to "be built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the Head of the corner." And thus also in the description of the New Jerusalem, in the Apocalypse, it is said, "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb." All the Apostles then, nay, the Prophets or inferior teachers also, were in one sense *foundations* of the Church. Upon their labors and doctrine Christ built it up. And of these foundation-stones none more honored than the Apostle Peter, since upon him first, both the Jewish and Gentile converts were built up into the Church. But that this designation of the Apostles, and of Peter especially, does not make them *the firm foundation* upon which the whole Church of the redeemed rests, is evident from multiplied passages. This interpretation makes the Scriptures contradict themselves. For we are told expressly, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We desire no stronger testimony to this point than that of the Apostle Peter himself, in his first Epistle: "To whom (i. e. to Christ) coming as unto a living stone, disal-

lowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house; . . . wherefore, also, it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you, therefore, which believe, he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient." Is this the language of a man who supposed himself to be substituted for Jesus Christ, as the foundation of the Church of God? Deplorable, indeed, would be our condition, if we had only a frail mortal like ourselves as the rock on which rests our eternal hope. Let others choose, if they will, to desert our Immanuel, this corner-stone, elect and precious, to build upon a poor fellow-sinner. "Their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being the judges." Upon Jesus, and upon him alone, let us build our house, and no storms shall overthrow, no floods shall undermine it. "For whoso believeth on Him shall not be confounded." So far, then, as the first point is concerned, it is evident from Scripture, that while Peter, and not he alone, but his fellow Apostles also, are called foundations of the Church, yet it is in a sense entirely different from that in which

Christ is the foundation. And inasmuch as the Romish sense would thrust Christ out of his place, and destroy the whole testimony of the word of God as to his being the Head of the Corner; and inasmuch as this designation being also given to the other Apostles wholly disproves any peculiar privilege of Peter, therefore the first step in this argumentation is false—the first link of the chain, when it is proved, snaps asunder, and the whole sequence falls. God forbid that you and I should have no stronger dependence to bear us up in the day of trial.

2. The words of Christ conferred on the Apostle no supreme lordship over his brethren and the whole Church, invested him with no infallible authority beyond his fellow Apostles in controversies of faith, and did not constitute him in any special, exalted sense the vicar of Christ on earth. As to the alleged lordship or supremacy, the next page of the gospel of St. Matthew is utterly contradictory to it. “At that time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Certainly the Apostles themselves could not have understood the Saviour’s language as investing Peter with this pretended headship, or the question would have been wholly out of place. But if the Lord had so intended he would at once have replied, “Why that point has just been settled. By giving Peter the keys, I have constituted

him the greatest in my kingdom, and you must all submit to him." But what is the Saviour's reply? " And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in The kingdom of heaven." The same unseemly strife for preeminence occurred among them at the last supper, and was rebuked by their Lord in equally decisive terms. " And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve." Could our Lord have spoken more plainly on this point? And in the history of the Apostles we find no shadow of claim of Peter to any such superiority, nor any evidence on the part of the other Apostles that they supposed such deference and submission to be his due. On the contrary, we find repeated confutations of such an assumption. No directions are given in the epistles as to the obedience required of Christians to the Vicar of Christ on earth, which would be, on the Romish supposition, a strange and unaccountable

omission.* In the assembly or council of the Apostles, elders, and brethren, at Jerusalem, recorded in *Acts xv.*, the matter in question was not submitted to Peter's infallible determination, and if any Apostle presided there, it was not Peter, but James.

As to the supposed grant of infallibility, it is remarkable that we have on record more instances of mistake on the part of this Apostle, than of any of his brethren. One of these took place immediately after this address of Christ. No sooner had the Lord thus highly commended his faith, than he had occasion to rebuke him for his improper suggestion, in terms of uncommon severity. "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter erred in desiring his Master to abide there for ever, leaving the atonement unaccomplished, and the world unredeemed. In the garden of Gethsemane, he erred by smiting with the sword to defend him; in the High Priest's palace, most grievously, by denying him. And long after this, he was so inclined to yield to the overbearing Judaizers in the Church, that his brother Apostle, Paul, "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Was this becoming conduct on St. Paul's part to the infallible Head of

* Barrow on Pope's Supremacy, 163.

the Church, or does it consist with the slightest idea that Christ had deputed this Apostle as his vicar and representative? The whole tenor, therefore, of the subsequent Apostolic history, is utterly incompatible with this bold assertion of a supreme headship, now established by the Saviour in his Church. If you seek scriptural allusions to Papal authority, you must look for them, not in the passage before us, but in others of a very different tenor : Daniel vii. 20-25 ; 2 Thess ii. 3-10 ; 1 Tim. iv. 1-3 ; Rev. xvii. We find no such enormous grant conferred on Peter, here or elsewhere, but we do read of "that man of sin to be revealed, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

3. The third link of this chain of assumptions is, that the authority or privilege conferred upon Peter should pass to his successors. This again we deny, any further than the gospel ministry generally is concerned. Observe that in other passages, promises are made in the same language to all the Apostles. In speaking of offences requiring discipline, (Matt. xviii. 18.) the Saviour engages to ratify their godly decisions. "Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." Thus

the promise is not peculiar to Peter, but on this occasion Christ solemnly invested him with that Apostolic authority, which afterwards was communicated to his brethren. But so far as a special recompence was intended to Peter for his good confession, it was wholly personal, and not to pass to any successors. We may thus paraphrase the passage. "Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Thou hast not learned this great truth from man, neither did thy own unassisted reason teach it thee. It is the gift of God. His Holy Spirit hath enlightened thy darkness, overcome thy prejudices, and impelled thee to welcome me as thy Saviour, and to bow to me as thy Lord. And in recompence of thy prompt and grateful acknowledgment, I assure thee, that as I have already named thee, Petros, a stone; so thou shalt be, as an honored Apostle, one of the foundation stones of my Church; that Church which I will surely build upon myself, the elect and precious corner stone, and upon the holy truth thou hast first professed; and so firmly establish that death itself, the gate of Hades, or the world invisible, shall have no power to destroy it; but it shall continue so long as the world endureth, and gather generation after generation within its sacred walls, until time shall be no more. And not only do I endue thee, in common with thy fellow Apostles,

with authority to declare my gospel under the unerring guidance of my Spirit; to publish with authority the terms of salvation; to declare what part of the old dispensation is binding, and what is repealed; to declare the sins of the penitent and believing forgiven; and to testify to the stubborn and impenitent that they are yet under condemnation—but I also bestow on thee this peculiar favor; I give unto thee in a special manner the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that Church which I am about to establish. Thou art chosen first to use those keys. It shall be thy privilege to unlock the door of that kingdom, both to Jews and Gentiles. Thou shalt be the first to announce, after my ascension to heaven, that the kingdom is open to all believers, and shalt be signally honored and blessed in drawing multitudes to enter it." This was Christ's promise, and it was signally fulfilled, first, when Peter stood up at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, and so testified for Christ that there were added to his Church the same day three thousand souls; and, secondly, when God made choice of him to preach the gospel to Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles, thus making manifest the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. Thus the promise, so far as it did not embrace the twelve, was a personal promise to Peter, terminating in himself, and there

is no shadow of scripture proof for extending it to any successors.

4. The fourth link of the chain is, if anything, weakest of all, viz: that the Popes of Rome are Peter's successors, and heirs of all this pretended immense grant of infallibility and supremacy. It is doubtful whether Peter ever was at Rome at all.* If he were there, and even founded that Church, which is without any proof, there is not a shadow of evidence that he remained there as its Bishop. He was the apostle of the Circumcision, and sought out the dispersed Jews in the divers regions which they inhabited; and his Apostleship, being of this missionary character, was incompatible with the Diocesan government of a particular Church. If reliance in this matter is to be placed upon ancient testimony, it would rather assign him to the see of Antioch than of Rome. There is no reasonable ground therefore to believe that he ever held this office. And if it were ever so clearly made out, it would not thence follow that the Popes are his successors, or that his mantle and his prerogatives have devolved upon them. The whole claim is barefaced assumption; and is properly met by downright, peremptory denial. It is in fact the fruit of worldly ambition. It grew first out of the ancient grandeur of Rome

* Barrow, p. 130.

as the metropolis of the world. The Church partook of the importance and wealth of the city. It acquired, from that source, a degree of influence and consequence. Its chief pastor was regarded with correspondent respect and deference—and thus was temptation presented to his ambition. And as a pretext for this aggrandizement and lordship over God's heritage, the passage before us was seized upon, and wrested in the manner that has been described.

But examine this towering and portentous structure, and you find its foundation on the sand. And it is an instructive comment upon this proud claim to supremacy and infallibility, to note into what grievous and Anti-Christian errors this Church has been left to fall. I need not recount the fearful catalogue of her corruptions of the faith. God be thanked that we have been delivered from her oppressive yoke, though not without the blood of our martyred forefathers. Let us stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Before leaving the passage, I ask you to observe for a moment two points unconnected with its controversial aspect. First, note the blessedness of a heartfelt confession of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Saviour pronounces a blessing upon his Apostle who was most forward in uttering it. Peter

was, as we perceive from his subsequent history, in many things ignorant and prejudiced. He committed faults. He fell into sins. His future life was to be one of poverty, privation, and persecution; his death violent and bloody. And yet he is pronounced by his Lord himself, blessed, or happy—for he knew Christ, and was willing to acknowledge him. His heart rejoiced in the discovery of his Saviour—and his lips gladly confessed him to be both Lord and Christ. Forget not, then, that Saviour's emphatic words.—“Whoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Peter confessed that Saviour in the season of his humiliation. Do any of you hesitate to confess him now that he is on his throne of glory?

Secondly, observe the fulfilment, at this day, of Christ's promise concerning his Church. The gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. Christ's Church, after 1800 years of trial and warfare, is still upon the earth. The rage of Satan, and the opposition of the powers of darkness have not been able to exterminate it. Time, which has overthrown and buried so many proud and powerful kingdoms of this world, has not swept it away. Death itself, (which is supposed to be the more accurate meaning of the expression,

"the gates of Hades,") hath been powerless to destroy it. Its members are continually dying, but the Church itself never dies. It is abiding, perpetual, immortal. You have it with all its privileges, and means of grace, and covenant mercies, as fully and truly as the disciples of the Apostolic age. It will live. It will continue to testify of Christ and things divine and heavenly, to invite the sinner, to welcome the returning penitent, to build up the Lord's people in their most holy faith, until the mystery is finished, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God. And, then, that spiritual kingdom which was set up on this earth, shall outlive earth itself; and endure an everlasting monument of redeeming love and grace; for it is founded *upon a Rock*. And that Rock is not a mere man, not a creature, but the elect and precious corner stone laid in Zion, even Christ Jesus himself, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

THE SEVERE REBUKE.

MATTHEW XVI. 22, 23.

"Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

THIS rebuke of the Apostle, whose life we are now reviewing, has been noticed in connection with his Lord's commendatory language, immediately preceding it, which has been so strangely wrested. It would seem as if there were specially intended, by that Holy Ghost who guided the pen of the Evangelists, in the close connection of these two passages, a positive and solemn contradiction of the forced meaning that would be afterwards put upon the first. The Church of Rome, in order to find some Scripture argument for her high-handed usurpations, and oppressive lordship over God's heritage, claims that the Saviour's answer to Peter's good confession invested him with an infallible judgment in all matters pertaining to the faith, so that he could neither err himself, nor could his pretended successors err till the end of time. But the Lord hath taken care that the very

next incident of the Gospel history should be sufficient to scatter this proud assertion to the winds.—No sooner have these words, which have been thus signally perverted, fallen from the lips of Christ, than the same Apostle plunges into a most grievous error, upon a point of vital consequence. He undertakes to advise his Lord, and dissuade him from his proposed passion and death, and receives in return one of the most withering reproofs which that meek and lowly One ever uttered. And the very point and occasion of that rebuke is his inexcusable want of discernment in spiritual things, his betrayal of so earthly a judgment and so carnal a heart. The contrast, indeed, between the commendation and the reproof is highly instructive. It is at once a most overwhelming disproof of the baseless and arrogant pretensions of the Papacy; and also an affecting comment on the weakness, blindness, and fallibility of man, even when most honored and privileged. On the very same day, we find this Apostle commended most honorably for his faith and attachment to his Lord, and reproved in terms of the utmost severity for his blindness and unbelief. One moment he is the most favored of the Apostles, a chosen foundation-stone of the Church, presented with the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and the next, he is visited with his Lord's stern displeasure, and addressed as if he were Satan himself, the great enemy of

God and man. Surely such an incident, in the life of such an Apostle, should teach us to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of. We learn that man, in his best estate, is subject to error and prejudice. Those who seem most deserving of our confidence, if we repose in them that implicit trust which is due only to the word of our Maker, may lead us astray. God be thanked that we have his safe, and sure, and infallible word as "a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path." "Our faith," therefore, "standeth not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Even a Peter, whose knowledge of Christ is not derived from flesh and blood, but from our Father in heaven; and who is called blessed by the Master's own lips, and numbered among his confidential friends and chosen Apostles, may, in his advice and counsel, savor of the things that be of men, rather than of the things that be of God. Even he is to be listened to, only so far as he is sustained by the lively oracles of God. While then it becomes every Christian to recognize his individual frailty and liability to error, to distrust himself, to receive with meekness and docility the instructions of the stewards and watchmen of his Lord's household, he is at the same time authorized and required to go to the holy Scripture, as the ultimate arbiter of his faith. He is, with the Bereans, to search the Scrip-

tures in an humble, honest, prayerful spirit, to ascertain whether these things be so. From this great privilege and bounden duty, no man, no minister, no Church has the right to debar him. God himself hath spoken to man in his blessed word—hath spoken distinctly and intelligibly ; and man may, therefore, and ought to listen reverently to the voice of God. But while we claim and use this most invaluable privilege, let us remember that we are no more exempt from prejudice and error than others ; and let us cultivate that spirit of humility and candor, and that sincere dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which are the best safeguard against mistake. If even a Peter stumbled and erred so greatly, let us not be high-minded, but fear. And let us not forget that the times in which we are most lifted up, when we think we have made some special attainments in knowledge or grace, are the very times of chiefest peril.

It seems that our Saviour, immediately after assenting to the truth of Peter's confession, and thus solemnly reassuring his followers that he was the expected Messiah and the Son of the living God, thought it necessary to moderate their high-raised anticipations, by speaking to them of his approaching sufferings and ignominious death. " From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem,

and suffer many things of the elders, and chief-priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." As if he would say to them, " You expect that I, your acknowledged Messiah and Prince, will speedily ascend the throne of David, and exalt my people to greatness and glory. You are dreaming of an earthly kingdom, with all its rewards, riches and honors. But far different is the reality. I came now upon earth to suffer, rather than to reign. The way to my throne is by the cross and the tomb. Dismiss these vain expectations. Know yourselves to be the disciples of a despised and suffering Master, and seek your recompense in another world than this." The mention by his Lord of these approaching indignities and cruel inflictions greatly excited the Apostle Peter. It seems to have shocked alike his ambition and his affection. Tenderly attached to his Master, he cannot bear to hear of his subjection to such insults and sufferings. Elated with the commendations which he had just received, and indulging new and higher hopes of earthly distinction, he is unwilling to be convinced that they are all baseless. He proceeds therefore to remonstrate with him in a tone of mingled affection and authority, deprecating such an event, and urging him to dismiss altogether such unwelcome thoughts. He seems to think that his Saviour's recent words of approbation gave him some right

to interfere with his plans, and to counsel him as a friend. "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee." "Wherefore, Lord, indulge such gloomy forebodings, or why harbor the purpose of exposing thyself to such a doom ? This must not be. We can by no means consent that thou, who art so dear to us, shouldest incur such dangers, or submit to so undeserved and cruel a fate. Dismiss, we entreat thee, all such thoughts, and prepare rather to vindicate thy lofty claims, and to take speedy possession of that royalty which is justly thine."

Now there was certainly much of tenderness mingled with this remonstrance of the warm-hearted Apostle. And we may at first be struck with astonishment at the peculiar severity of the Saviour's answer. "But he turned, and said unto Peter, get thee behind me, Satan ; thou art an offence unto me : for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." But think, for a moment, what would have been the consequence of following Peter's counsel. The purport of it was to keep back the Redeemer from his cross—that cross which should be the altar of the great atoning sacrifice; and whereunto should be nailed all the sins of his ransomed people. And what would this have been but to have made void the great purpose of redeeming love ; to have left

the world unredeemed—sinners under the unpealed curse, the whole creation still groaning and travailing in hopeless, helpless anguish? The Son of the blessed came to earth to reconcile earth and heaven by his painful life and agonizing death—to pour forth a blood, speaking better things than that of Abel; crying for pardon and not for vengeance; proclaiming peace and not condemnation; washing out the crimson stains of our guilt, and purging our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. The salvation of a lost world, the recovery of untold multitudes of immortal beings from sin and wrath, hung upon that hour of agony. What was Peter's suggestion, therefore, but urging the Redeemer to give up his purpose of heavenly compassion, and to forego the rich recompence of the travail of his soul? He knew not indeed what he said. But it was in truth saying unto his Lord, "Spare thyself this burden of sorrow and suffering: consult thine own ease: Leave sinners to their fate. Withhold the priceless treasures of thy purposed grace, and let men go down to the abyss of woe, unpitied and unrelieved."

This was the purport of Peter's remonstrance. And though himself unconscious of the import of his words, yet his presumption in attempting to instruct his master, justly deserved the scathing rebuke which followed. How well is it, that all

matters pertaining to our redemption and salvation, are ordered, not by the hasty judgment and narrow views of man, but by the infinite wisdom and unbounded mercy of the Triune God. And still more reason is there to notice with admiration the love of Jesus, in this language of reprobation, rather than its sternness. How does his divine compassion, his heavenly benevolence breathe in these words, of apparent anger? Oh how strongly did love for our ruined souls and zeal for our salvation impel the willing victim to the sacrificial altar? He thinks of the great and precious results of his submission to death. He looks onward to the day when he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. When does he display such indignation as when it is attempted to keep him back from his cross? He contemplates the great victory over the power of Satan, the eternal glory that shall redound to God, the peopling of the many mansions of his Father's House with ransomed, blood-washed souls, meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. And he spurns from him the first whisper of abandonment of his holy purpose. Let one of his dearest friends and chieftest Apostles name such a thing, and he straightway appears to him as the great adversary of God and man. For what could be more truly the desire of Satan, than to hinder the redemption of the world? What counsel more in consonance

with diabolical designs and wishes, than to keep back the Redeemer from his cross, and abandon the world to perish in its own corruption. Let the motive in the speaker's breast be what it may, let it be misguided tenderness and ignorant affection, he treated it with no indulgence. It was a Satanic proposal, under the mask of friendship. It savored not of divine wisdom and goodness, but of carnal policy and self indulgence. It would withdraw the mind of Jesus, from the high and noble objects of his mission, to his personal endurances. It would seek to implant in his pure breast a selfish consideration of his own ease and exemption from sorrow, such as would overlook the amazing and glorious fruits of his agonies and blood. I see, as the most prominent feeling in this apparently harsh language, mercy to our lost world, love to our sinful souls. Unworthy as we are of such an intervention, our salvation was unspeakably precious to our Lord. When but a whisper is breathed to him of abandoning his purpose, how indignant is his repulse? "Away," he exclaims, "with this insidious suggestion, this misplaced tenderness, this pretence of sparing me the anguish of the cross. Thou, who durst name such a thing to me, art no longer Peter, a chosen foundation stone of the Church, but Satan, the great adversary. Thou art an offence unto me, a hindrance in my way, a stumbling block in my path."

Thy counsel is not of God, but of the earth, earthly. No consideration of personal ease shall detain me from my purpose, or prevent me from pressing on with steadfast resolution, and unfaltering step, to that painful death which has been before my eyes from the beginning."

And if Jesus be so indignant at any attempt to keep him from that cross which he would endure for sinners, shall he be less so at any attempts to keep back sinners themselves from that cross which is their only hope? What are efforts to shake men's faith in the great atonement of the Lamb of God; to hold in reserve the precious doctrine, instead of publishing it far and wide; to deny the worth of that propitiatory sacrifice, and disparage the efficacy of that most precious blood? What are such efforts but attempts of the great adversary to hinder men's salvation? It is the will of God that the finished and glorious redemption of the cross be published over the earth—that all for whom Jesus died should be made acquainted with the object of his death; that men, everywhere and under all circumstances, should be pointed to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. Proclaim it, as with the blast of a trumpet, from the house-top—tell it out among the heathen—testify it to high and low, to young and old, to the learned and the ignorant, to the living and the dying, that a crucified Redeemer is

able to save them to the uttermost, and that there is salvation in none other. Let the man of most rigid morality and the vilest profligate know that they must be saved just alike, by grace, through faith in the sacrifice of the son of God. And let every attempt to conceal or disparage that most vital doctrine, of the free and complete justification of every sincere believer in that glorious redemption, be accounted as the work of him whose aim is to destroy immortal souls.

Another important lesson to be gathered from this passage, and one of which we all need to be constantly reminded, is the necessity of the disciple of Jesus taking up his cross also, and imbibing the self-denying spirit of his Lord. Peter's suggestion is exceedingly common. It rises in our own hearts, when religion presents its sacrifices and trials. It induces misguided friends to oppose the entrance of those whom they love into the way of life, or to dissuade them from pressing on in the path of obedience. How often does a misplaced tenderness interfere with the dictates of faith, and the resolves of duty? How often does a sincere but erroneous affection exclaim to one who is seeking to serve and glorify God—"Spare thyself: this shall not be unto thee." The young are giving heed to that voice which earnestly cries, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, ere the evil days come;" and straight-

way there are counsellors ready to represent the hardship of turning at such a season from the follies of the world, and foregoing what they call the fit enjoyments of youth. "Spare thyself the gloomy austerities of religion, and postpone as long as possible its irksome restraints." The mature and busy man becomes thoughtful of his eternal interests, and almost persuaded to be a Christian; and he is frightened from his purpose by suggestions that religion will interfere with his business, impair his influence, expose him to unkind observation and censorious remarks. The man who is addicted to some pernicious habit, meditates to break from its bondage; but the struggle appears too arduous, and the sacrifice too severe, and he shrinks back disheartened, to plunge into fresh indulgencies. How frequently and how fatally does Satan assume the mask of friendship, kindness and tenderness! A man's foes are oft those of his own household, laboring, in their supposed concern for his happiness, to clog his efforts, damp his zeal, and save him from the imagined discomforts and burdens of a decided Christian life. A walk above the world, a heavenly conversation, an humble following of the blessed footsteps of the Redeemer, an anxiety to benefit and save our fellow sinners, a watchful dread of evil, a desire to keep one's-self unspotted from sin, oft draw down the remonstrances of irreligious friends.

The world, and the followers of the world, regard with dislike practical Christianity. They think no trouble or hardship too great if the object be a worldly one; but any self-denial seems excessive and unreasonable for the kingdom of heaven's sake. They are lavish of expense for the gratification of luxury, pride and display; but they counsel the utmost frugality and parsimony in relation to the claims of the Gospel and the sufferings of the poor. They admire self-sacrificing enthusiasm, and fervor of spirit, in every concern but that of salvation. The merchant, the politician, the soldier, the adventurer, may be as eager, and earnest, and absorbed in their favorite pursuit as they will, but the candidate for immortality, the pursuer of heavenly and incorruptible treasures, must by no means be too ardent, or singular, or righteous over much. Men may deny themselves for every object except eternal life. They may forego ease, convenience, pleasure, home and friends for a corruptible crown, but not for an incorruptible. The moment eternity begins to absorb the soul, and temporal comforts and earthly joys are held cheap, in view of the favor of God and the kingdom of heaven, that moment comes in the remonstrance: "Spare thyself—this must not be unto thee." "Spare thyself this undue anxiety; avoid this self-denying duty; attempt not this irksome task; rid thyself of these cares

and burdens ; be not thus needlessly strict and scrupulous ; live as the rest of the world live ; be content with the average standard of goodness, and enjoy as thou canst the good things of this life, without so greatly troubling thyself about another." Whose suggestions are these ? Whose did Christ esteem them when addressed to Him ? Though Peter himself were the speaker, yet mark the Saviour's reply. Oh ! it is hard enough for weak mortals to enter in at the straight gate, and walk in the narrow way—to resist their own perverse wills and sinful propensities ; without being opposed and hindered by this imagined tenderness, but real cruelty of earthly friends—this great anxiety for their present ease and comfort—this reckless indifference as to their eternal safety.

But it is not merely from others, that hindrances are cast in the way of a faithful, zealous, consistent Christian life. He who inspires worldly friends with such misplaced tenderness, can instil the same feelings into our own hearts. The disuading voice, " Spare thyself—this shall not be unto thee," may come from within, as well as from without. Our Saviour proceeds immediately from the mention of his own cross, to instruct his disciples in reference to theirs. After indignantly repelling the counsel of Peter, and declaring it to be of earth, and not of heaven, he went on to say to his disciples, " If any man will come after me,

let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." And he enforces this self-denial with the most solemn considerations : "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it ; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?" Such is the plainness wherewith Jesus shows his disciples the cross, and such are the motives wherewith he urges them to take it up. " You fancy," he says to them, " that you have nothing to do in my service but to inherit glory. You promise yourselves a journey exempt from hardship, toil and suffering, and eternal life at the end. You cannot bear to hear me speak of my own cross. I tell you that there is a cross for each one of you. The disciple is not better than his Lord. And if you hope to reign with me, you must first suffer with me." Now we must, in faithfulness to our Lord, and to your souls, testify the same thing. It is not our business to clear every stone from your path, and blunt every thorn ; to show you how you can at once make provision for the flesh and the soul, and reconcile, at the same time, the service of God and Mammon. While we do maintain that godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come ; and believe that the sincere, faithful, whole-hearted Christian is, in the

end, an unspeakable gainer even here; yet we must remind you that this is the portion only of the whole-hearted and decided. A lukewarm, irresolute, unstable religion is the source of little joy here, and of small hope hereafter. To shun the cross, is either to make it ten-fold heavier in the end, or to lose the crown. You cannot be faithful followers of Christ without trouble, self-denial and devotedness. There are within you evil tempers to be mortified, unholy dispositions to be repressed, besetting sins to be laid aside. There are without you snares to be avoided, temptations to be overcome, frowns to be faced, enticements to be spurned. You must, if you would serve God and follow Christ, in many things go counter to the love of ease, the voice of the world, the pleadings of misguided friendship, the solicitations of appetite. To be a safe and happy Christian, you must be a diligent, pains-taking, earnest Christian. You cannot have the world, and the flesh, and the Saviour together. You must choose between them, and be resolute in your choice. No sooner are Christ's disciples brought to confess him as their Messiah and Lord, than he instructs them in the nature of his service, and warns them against that timid, temporizing, self-indulgent course, so congenial to our corrupt hearts. This is their Lord's manner of educating them for holy lives, peaceful deaths, and crowns of righteousness.

Let not, then, this admonitory passage in the Apostle's life fail of a salutary effect upon you, who profess to be seeking the kingdom of heaven. Regard those as your truest friends, not who counsel you to spare yourself in God's service, and deprecate all religious fervor and earnestness, but those who point out to you most plainly your dangers and besetting sins, and urge you most anxiously to patient continuance in well-doing. Guard against the self-pleasing suggestions of a deceitful heart. Expect not to be saved without pressing on vigorously in the Christian race, and striving manfully in the spiritual conflict. Enter into the exalted privileges of your high vocation ; contemplate the glorious prize presented to your hope ; think of the amazing change effected by your Redeemer's ungrudging love, in the condition, prospects and destiny of your undying soul, and you will "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord." For him you will be content "gladly to suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dross, that you may win Christ, and be found in him." And when tempted to murmur at your trials, and shrink from the burden of your cross, look at that cross which your Redeemer bore for you. Mark how willingly he suffered its unutterable agonies, for the sake of your salvation ; and how indignantly he repelled the solicitation to cast it away. And surely you

also will be strengthened to bid the tempter and take up with renewed energy the heavy burden. Welcome, dear Lord, any way, however rough, so it lead to thee—any cross, however ing, so we pass from it to thy kingdom.

THE DEATH-CHAMBER, THE MOUNT, AND THE GARDEN.

MARK V. 37.

"And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James."

It was the high privilege of the twelve Apostles to be the constant attendants upon our Lord Jesus Christ. During the three years of his ministry they were very rarely absent from his side. He admitted them into his closet and most familiar intimacy. He favored them with a near view of his daily life, and made them his companions as "he went about doing good," that they might be enabled to testify, from fullest knowledge, what manner of man he was. His was a life so pure and spotless, so benevolent and disinterested, so devout and heavenly, that it must be presented to a redeemed world in just and exact delineation. And hence, those his chosen followers, to whom was to be entrusted the task of recording and testifying to that life, were privileged with so close an intimacy. But while the twelve were all thus surpassingly favored, they were not all alike favored. The same good pleasure which chose them out of a world of sinful men to be his Apostles and Evan-

gelist, selected certain of them to be witnesses of some scenes, so peculiarly sacred, that even their brethren were not admitted to be present. To three of the twelve the Lord saw fit to extend this distinguishing grace. These were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and the Apostle whose life is the subject of our present consideration. It is probably not for us to know all the reasons that determined our Saviour in this selection, from the twelve, of confidential and bosom friends, to be with him in those peculiarly solemn seasons. It was no injustice or disparagement to their brethren to be excluded while they were admitted. These were occasions of such mysterious and hallowed tenderness, that the presence of any large number of bystanders would have been burdensome and intrusive. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." So many were required to prove to the satisfaction of the enquiring the reality of these marvellous events. Of the selected individuals, two, we know to have been distinguished from their brethren by the peculiar fervor of their attachment to their Master. Not exempt from infirmities and failings, they yet loved their Lord with a warmer and more lively affection—and it may very probably have been in response to this affection that their Lord bestowed upon them such special marks of favor.

I. The first of these remarkable occasions was the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead. Christ takes the favored three with him into *the chamber of death*. He hath been met on his journeys by the agonized father, clinging to the last hope of preservation for his dying child. It was the urgent anxiety of parental love that brought him a suppliant to Jesus. "He fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house : for he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a-dying." He, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, complies immediately with the earnest application. But on their way the sad announcement meets them, that succor is too late. "There cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead: trouble not the Master." But how full of confidence and consolation that Master's reply! "But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole." He enters the dwelling, now vocal with the sounds of grief. The natural expressions of sorrow burst from the survivors, and the melancholy notes of the musicians, who according to the usage of the age and country attended on such occasions, mingle with lamentations and wailings. With gentle authority, the Lord dismisses and silences the crowd. He suffers none to be present at the performance of

his intended miracle but the three disciples and the bereaved parents. There is now a solemn stillness in the death chamber. How much more congenial with such a scene than the noisy demonstrations of grief which had preceded ! The father and mother of the deceased, divided between grief and hope, watch with intense interest the proceedings. There lies the pallid corpse of one who had been the joy and delight of their dwelling. Those eyes, which had been wont to meet theirs in confiding love, are closed. Those lips, whose accents of affection had been music to their ears, are sealed. Over those features, so oft lit up with youthful cheerfulness, hath settled the fixed composedness of death. Clad in the habiliments of the grave and ready for the narrow house, is the form so endeared and lovely in their eyes. Oh death ! in thyself thou art a pitiless, heart-crushing visitor. The fairest blossoms of earth wither at thine icy touch. What can reconcile frail mortals to thine agonizing triumphs ; to thy partings and desolations ; to the lonely blank thou leavest in once joyous and happy homes, to the void thou makest in fond, affectionate hearts ? Is there aught potent enough to soothe the anguish which thou causest, and inspire the desolate mourner with cheerful resignation ? Yes ! The presence of Christ can do it. If he come into the house of mourning, it is no longer night there. He

brings with him gracious promises and heavenly comfort. He enters the lonely and sorrowful dwelling, to hush the loud lamentation and still the rebellious murmur. He comes, if not wholly to remove, yet greatly to assuage the bitterness of grief. If he bid not the bereaved entirely to refrain from sorrow, yet he bids them to "sorrow not as others who have no hope." He speaks comforting words of a future resurrection; of a heavenly home; of a blessed reunion, beyond this vale of tears, of them that have died in the Lord. "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth." And though no such instant exertion of his omnipotence be now promised, as that which gave back to these weeping parents their fondly loved child, yet faith can wait for the appointed time of restitution of treasures taken away, and calmly, hopefully, resignedly, repose on his sure word and sufficient grace.

The Lord approaches the lifeless body. He takes the cold, motionless hand in his. Two short words fall from his lips: "Talitha cumi—Dam-sel, arise." And immediately that stiffened form moves again. Those eyes, that had seemed to take their last look of earth, re-open. New life animates the countenance—new strength invigorates the limbs. In the words of St. Luke, "Her spirit came again, and she arose straightway." That mysterious principle, the living soul, which dies not when the body dies, which sojourns as a guest

in the tabernacle of clay, but perishes not in its ruin, returns to its former habitation ; and the earthly tabernacle, instead of hastening back to dust, becomes again sensitive and quickened. Wherever that spirit has been borne, it was within the reach of Christ's power, and subject to the control of his word. And to such a power, what is impossible ! How easy the resurrection of all that sleep in the dust to one whose word is thus resistless ! He who spake beside that death-bed the two reviving words, was, indeed, the Resurrection and the Life. His voice shall sound in the ear of every sleeper with as much potency as in that of the Jewish damsel. All that have ever died, shall confess its might, and obey its summons. Could these privileged disciples, after witnessing this scene, doubt or question their Lord's power ? How strong might well be their faith in him, at whose command death relinquished his prey, the spirit returned back to earth, and the corpse was in a moment reanimated ? And while the three Apostles were astonished at his unearthly power, must they not also have been filled with admiration of his tender compassion for mortal sorrow, as he left the dwelling, at his coming, so desolate and dark, full of joy, gratitude and praise ?

II. On this occasion, the three disciples saw their Master exerting a superhuman power, while himself clothed in the garb of humiliation. His

word was mighty, but his countenance was that of a meek and lowly man, and nought in his appearance distinguished him from other men.

The next privilege of this kind exhibited him to their eyes in a majesty before unknown. "He took Peter, John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory ; and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."* It would seem that on this, as at several other times, the Saviour passed the whole night upon the mountain-top in prayer. The disciples, not sharing in the fervor of their Lord's devotion, yielded to the infirmity of nature. "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep." From this slumber they are wakened by a dazzling splendor. More intense than the bright beams of the rising sun, shone the radiance that now lighted up, at the midnight hour, the summit of Mount Tabor. "When they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him." Their beloved Master was no more the humble Nazarene. "His countenance did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."†

* Luke ix. 28-31. † Matt. xvii. 2.

A change most astonishing hath come over him. He who had walked with them in the simple attire of poverty, is now clothed with light as with a garment. The splendor of his own glorified form shines through his raiment, rendering it "exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can whiten them."* A radiance not of earth encircles him, and a light above that of the meridian sun, beams from his countenance. Two shining ones are his companions. The amazed disciples, recovering from their first astonishment, discover these mysterious visitants, from their conversation, to be Moses and Elijah. Both exhibit their reverence for the glorified Jesus. Thus the law and the prophets bear witness to him. He who brought the law of God from Sinai's quaking summit, and he who vindicated that law amid a generation wholly given to idolatry, now pay homage to Him, the great end and object of their prophetic and typical ministrations. And a still mightier testimony is given: "A bright cloud," the symbol of the divine presence, the same which had been wont to dwell in the holy place of the tabernacle, overshadowed the awe-struck disciples. "And a voice came out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, hear him." Thus was Jesus manifested in his glory—shown in his unapproachable

* Mark ix. 3.

superiority to the chiefest of God's ancient servants ; exhibited as the great object of attention and reverence to those whom Israel counted as the most honored of their prophets ; confessed, by the Almighty voice, as the Son of the living God, to whom all must now hearken and obey. The three disciples witness somewhat of the inherent majesty of that Master, who was wont to treat them with such condescending kindness. They see how deep his humiliation in assuming the likeness of sinful man ; to how vast an eclipse his glory is subjected, in his ordinary appearance among mortals. They have a foretaste of his future manifestation. They can now better understand what he means when he speaks of "the Son of man coming in his glory." There is presented an impressive image of that his great appearing to judge the quick and the dead. For on the one side is Elijah, who never tasted death, but was borne heavenward in his car of fire, the type of those of whom the Apostle speaks : "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." And, on the other side, is Moses, who submitted to the common doom of man, the type of the risen dead.

The dazzling splendors of the scene appear to have thrown the Apostle Peter into a sort of ecstacy. Ravished with the glorious vision he

would enjoy it without interruption. He would detain for ever on this mountain summit his Master, in this celestial guise, and these his mysterious visitants. "And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." "Not knowing what he said," adds St. Luke—as if the suggestion required excuse, and was to be imputed not to reflection and reason, but to trepidation and haste. It was indeed the impulse of inconsiderate rapture. It showed forgetfulness of the rebuke which he had just before received from his Master, for striving to dissuade him from the painful cross. And even the converse of Moses and Elias with his Lord, respecting the decease to be accomplished at Jerusalem, had failed to bring back to his mind the necessity of this solemn event. He had not yet become reconciled to the great mystery of a suffering Christ. And now, perceiving the real majesty of his Lord, he would not have him again lay aside his garments of glory. No ! let him, as Messiah and Prince, hold his court upon Tabor, invested with dazzling splendors that would compel the world to admit his Lordship and pay him homage. Or let them continue in that ecstacy of delight, into which the contemplation of a scene so heavenly had thrown them, forgetting the world with all its grovelling

pleasures, and fruitless cares, its misery, sorrow, and corruption. "And what then, Peter, shall become of that wretched world, and its lost inhabitants? Shall the curse wherewith it was smitten continue heavy upon it? Shall unhappy mortals go down to the tomb without a friend, a helper, a Saviour? Shall sin rage and riot in unchecked triumph, and death reign without remedy?" Here too we find the suggestion of the Apostle savoring not of the things that be of God, but of the things of men. His Lord's purpose was far different. He came to earth not to shine resplendent and admired before the eyes of men, but to work out a great redemption by humiliation and suffering. Even on the Mount, he is talking with Moses and Elijah of the decease to be accomplished at Jerusalem. Speedily is this bright vision to fade—the heavenly radiance to vanish, the unearthly visitants to depart, and the Saviour and his disciples to descend to the world—the unquiet, unhappy, sinful, hostile world below. Peter must learn that the life of a true Christian is not one of mere rapture and transport, of dreamy contemplation and uninterrupted ecstasy. He must learn that the disciple of Christ is left in the world, amid its every-day trials, its temptations, its disappointments, its chilling realities, its besetments and enmities, that he may follow in his Lord's footsteps, exhibit his Lord's spirit, and do

somewhat in his Lord's strength to make that world purer, better, and happier. But to nerve the Christian for the difficulties of his warfare, to inspire him with strength, energy, and courage, what so conducive as to have been with Jesus on the Mount ; to have caught some glimpses of his glory ; to have been lifted up with thoughts and impressions of his celestial loveliness, and his saving grace ; to realize how unspeakably exalted, how ineffably glorious, how admired and adored by all the company of Heaven, is that Redeemer whose name is written on our foreheads, and with whom we are united in bonds stronger than death ? No wonder that the scene on Tabor left so deep and abiding an impression on the Apostle's mind that we find him long afterwards, and nearly at the close of his earthly sojourn, recalling it to his own mind, and to his brethren, as a most strong and undeniable confirmation of their faith in that Saviour's divine character and future Advent, " For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came

from heaven, we heard, when we were with him in the holy Mount.”*

III. The chosen three were their Lord’s companions on yet another, and still more solemn occasion. And the spectacle of his divine majesty might have been intended to prepare them for the heart-affecting and distressing scene in the garden of Gethsemane. The same who were eye witnesses of his glory, were selected to be with him in his agony. “And he taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be sore amazed and very heavy ; and saith unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death : tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee ; take away this cup from me ; nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou, couldest not thou watch one hour ? And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.† And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly : and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”‡ This was the scene of more than mor-

* 2 Peter i. 16, 18. † Mark xiv. 38, 39.

‡ Luke xxii. 44.

tal anguish at which the three disciples were permitted to be present. And yet how do we find them occupied? Charged to watch and pray; their beloved Master struggling under the mountain burden of a world's iniquities, pleading with his Father in tones and words that might have moved to responsive pity the cold earth itself, crimsoned with the big drops wrung from him by his anguish; and these his familiar friends, instead of aiding him with fervent prayers and whispering to him words of consolation, buried in slumber; sleeping, while Christ is agonizing; reckless of him, while he is groaning, and bleeding, and wrestling for their salvation. "Oh, Peter! couldst thou not watch one hour? Thou, who hadst just boasted of thy readiness to *die* with Christ? Art thou so soon asleep?" Their compassionate Lord indeed was ready to extenuate their conduct: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak:" if we take these words as an excuse, rather than an admonitory warning. But when they afterwards recalled the touching scene, their Master's strong crying and tears, his earnest pleadings, his unearthly sorrows, his love for them unabated by intensest sufferings, could they excuse themselves? Could they not have watched, one hour, with such a Master, at such a time?

But before we reproach them, brethren, let us inquire how is it with ourselves? Are we not also

charged to watch and pray ? Ought we not also to have fellowship with the sufferings of Christ ? Ought we not to be looking constantly with reverence, faith, and love to Him, " who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." And is not the appointed vigil brief ? Can we not watch with Christ one hour ? Shall our Lord bear the whole bitterness of death for us, and shall we supinely slumber, and dream away that life which ought to be devoted to his service, in worldliness, irreligion, folly, and sloth. Oh, let the blinded lovers of pleasure and gain, the indolent, self-pleasing, unprofitable professors of Christ's name take heed, lest their Lord coming suddenly find them sleeping. If they will slumber, when a suffering, bleeding Saviour calls them to watch, greatly is it to be feared that, when, at the midnight hour, the cry is raised, " Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him :"—they will be found unready ; and ere their preparation be made, the door of the kingdom will be shut.

We find, then, in reviewing these incidents, that the chosen Disciples were permitted to witness Christ in three most solemn and interesting moments—to witness him, ministering to the relief of mortal sorrow ; to witness him, transfigured and resplendent with celestial dignity ; to witness him, bearing the world's guilt, and wrestling for our redemption. They were permitted to behold Him

as the sympathizing High Priest, in the house of Jairus : as the King of Glory, upon the Mount : as the Lamb of God, the atoning Saviour, at Gethsemane. From the one scene, they would learn the willingness and the power of Jesus to comfort them that mourn ; from the second, his inherent majesty and future sublime manifestation ; from the last, his unutterable love for lost man, and the cost at which the world was redeemed. And thus they would go forth as his heralds, to proclaim this Saviour in his different offices—his saving grace, as Redeemer ; his sympathy with our griefs and sorrows, as Friend and Brother ; his divine majesty and glory, as King of kings, and Lord of lords. They leave the Chamber of Death prepared to announce their Redeemer as the Resurrection and the Life, the hearer of prayer, the comforter in affliction, the alleviator of misery. They descend from the Mount to testify to the world his exceeding greatness—to announce Him as soon to appear again, coming with clouds, surrounded by angelic hosts, clothed with unearthly majesty—the appointed Judge of quick and dead. They go from the Garden to bear witness that the fountain hath been opened for sin and for uncleanness ; to proclaim the faithful saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; to point the trembling penitent to Gethsemane and Calvary ; to publish pardon, peace and salvation.

Neither are we debarred from like access to our Redeemer. We walk, indeed, by faith, not by sight. We see not yet face to face ; but we can realize the presence and power of our Lord Jesus Christ, though to the bodily eye invisible. It is sometimes our privilege to be with Jesus in the house of mourning—to witness his blessed presence lighting up the death-chamber with unearthly radiance. We see the smile on the countenance of the dying ; we hear the utterance of hope from the pallid lip. The terrors of the grave are dispelled, and death is swallowed up of victory. The bereaved bless and praise God, even in their tribulation. They weep, but not in the bitterness of hopeless grief. They are distressed, but not in despair ; afflicted, but not forsaken ; for Jesus is there. We go, burdened with guilt, to Gethsemane. We gaze upon the prostrate and stricken form of our great surety, wounded for our sins and bruised for our iniquities ; and we apply that bitter passion to our guilt-stained souls, and look up to God as our reconciled Father, and receive the freely extended, the blood-bought pardon.

And the hour cometh when we shall behold Jesus in his glory, clothed in majesty divine, revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire. And that we may then hail his advent with joy, we must now seek him in faith. How vast a promise is that recorded by one of the

very apostles who was with Jesus on the Moun
“ Beloved, now are we the sons of God ; and
doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but v
know that, when he shall appear, we shall be li
him ; for we shall see him as he is.”

THE LAST SUPPER.

JOHN XIII. 8, 9.

"Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

THE scene at the last supper, when Jesus, just before his offering of himself as a sacrifice for sin, ate the Passover, with the twelve, and instituted that holy rite wherein his death should be commemorated until his coming again, can scarce be contemplated by the Christian without benefit. There is a sorrowful mystery attending our Lord's conduct, and breathing in his words ; a degree of interest and affection manifested towards his disciples ; a solemnity, pathos and sublimity in his discourses, that must deeply impress the reflecting reader. The spirit of divine tenderness, the temper of heaven, shine with unusual lustre, and make the upper room, in which the Lord and his disciples are gathered, a holy place.

We are now drawn to the consideration of this affecting occasion, in its bearing upon the life of the Apostle Peter, the part which he took therein, and his Lord's deportment towards him. It is not

one of the least instructive scenes in the eventful and edifying history of this great Apostle.

In making the arrangements for the celebration of the Passover, our Saviour was pleased to exhibit his wondrous Omniscience in such a manner as must greatly have astonished his disciples ; and with reference, perhaps, to the coming danger of Peter, he selected him as one who should witness this evidence of his Master's unbounded knowledge. He would thus be armed with a fresh proof of that Master's unearthly greatness ; and though this very favor might enhance the guilt of his fall, it would yet conduce to his more speedy recovery. "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare ? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water ; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the good man of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples ? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished : there make ready."* Now, however simple the tenor of

this narrative, it is evident that such a direction implies an unlimited knowledge on the part of the speaker. For what could seem more entirely accidental and fortuitous than that the disciples should encounter this man bearing the pitcher of water, soon after their entrance into the city; and that following him, they should be led into the very house where they could obtain the desired room for the paschal feast? Such an instance of foreknowledge of an incident seemingly so trivial and casual, is adapted to overthrow our common impressions of chance and accident, and to exhibit the unlimited extent of our Redeemer's vision. Had the token failed, had no such individual presented himself in the street, or no such hospitable owner inhabited the house into which the man entered, there would have been such an ominous failure in our Lord's prophetic powers, that, in connection with the events of the night, and the tragedy of the morrow, it might have altogether blighted the faith of his disciples. Whereas, now they would have an additional evidence of his divine mission—a fresh proof to recur to in the hour of doubt and dismay—and might well reason, that, to one who could thus foresee the most seemingly accidental and minute occurrences, nothing could happen without his own determinate counsel and foreknowledge, nor without leading to great and glorious results. And we may learn from it that

we are never hidden from that piercing eye, and that there is nothing really unimportant or trifling in our lives, inasmuch as eternal destinies are before us.

After they were gathered at the paschal feast, it pleased the Saviour to exhibit, in a remarkable manner, the wondrous abasement to which he had submitted, in order to redeem the world, as well as to give his people a striking example of that spirit of humility which he was so oft inculcating upon them. This passage in his history is related by St. John in the following words :—“ Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, (the Devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him,) Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God ; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments ; and took a towel and girded himself. After that, he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” Observe in this narrative, first, the characteristic of our Lord’s affection for his people. “ Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

The love of Jesus Christ is a persevering love. It is no capricious, uncertain, fitful regard. It dates back from before the foundation of the world. It looks onward through eternity. It is proof against the frequent interruptions to which earthly affection is liable. It "is not easily provoked, endureth all things, hopeth all things." With how much of waywardness and fickleness, of ingratitude and unkindness does it bear? And though so often thanklessly repelled and slighted, how ready is it to welcome again the returning penitent? Oh, if Christ's love for us were less enduring, less persevering, surely we had exhausted it long ago, and been utterly cast away! But it bears with our provocations beyond all limits of mortal endurance; and those calamities and reverses which estrange worldly friends, only make our Redeemer's love more manifest and comforting. The love of Christ is never turned away from those upon whom the world may look coldly and contemptuously. It flows forth more largely and freely to the poor, the afflicted, the bereaved, the sick and the dying. Make him your friend, and he will prove a fast and firm friend, cleaving closer than a brother, following you with his loving kindness through all the changes of this mortal life, standing by you though all others forsake you, supplying the want of those objects of affection whom his Providence removes, watching

over you in sickness and weakness, filling your heart with joy and peace in the time of sorrow, soothing the death-bed, and ready to receive your departing spirit, and take it to his own mansions of blessedness. "For having loved his own that were in the world, he loves them unto the end."

Of this fervent and disinterested affection he now proceeded to give his Apostles an unexpected proof. "And supper being ended," or rather, (as it should be translated,) being prepared, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that, he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." The Evangelist is careful to join with this act of condescension, an assertion of the amazing dignity of Him by whom it was exhibited. Jesus performed it, fully conscious of the height of his coming exaltation. He did not lose sight of his inherent Deity, or of his mediatorial kingdom. It was an act of voluntary humiliation on the part of Him who well understood that unto himself "every knee should bow." This act of our Saviour was, first, an impressive illustration of his exceeding self-abasement. "Being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, he

yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." Seeing him whom angels worship, and who lights up heaven with his glory, clad in such a garb, and performing so humble an office, we must be struck with his exceeding lowliness, and wonder at the extent of his voluntary impoverishment.

The act was, in the second place, designed to rebuke that most common and predominant, but really most pitiful and contemptible passion, human pride. It shows us that nothing is, in truth, so excellent as real humility—a spirit of unaffected condescension—a disposition to stoop to the infirmities and necessities of the weak and suffering. "Know ye," saith he, "what I have done to you? Ye call me Master, and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." It can be readily shown that our Lord here is enjoining not the after repetition of the very act which he performed, but the cultivation of that spirit of humbleness and affection which was thus manifested. The subsequent conduct of his apostles shows what was their understanding, and they certainly would be guided to understand him rightly. We nowhere find that such a practice as washing one another's feet prevailed, as a re-

ligious rite, in the apostolic Church. When Christ instituted his sacraments, "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace," the apostles, without hesitation, followed his example and injunction. We read constantly of their administering baptism and the Lord's supper to their converts. They never presumed, for a moment, to question their Lord's authority to appoint such external ordinances, and to annex to them such spiritual promises as he might see fit. And their conduct, in that respect, shows us plainly, that, if the Saviour had designed a religious rite, of the nature of this act at the last supper, to continue in his Church, they would have fully complied with it, and left us a record of such compliance. From this language of the Saviour, therefore, no evidence can be drawn that a new ordinance of this nature was intended by him, nor can any good argument be derived against the permanent obligation of those holy sacraments which the Saviour instituted so explicitly, and which the inspired apostles practised so scrupulously and reverently. But what our Lord evidently did intend, was to show his disciples how it became them to put on lowliness and humbleness of mind, in honor preferring one another, and each esteeming other better than himself. And it was specially designed as a rebuke of that unseemly contention for pre-eminence which had again manifested itself

among them ; for, at this very time, the strife had just been renewed which of them should be greatest.* If aught could have made them blush for such an exposure of pitiful ambition, at a time of such deep solemnity, it would have been this spectacle of their revered Master, performing to them one of the humblest possible offices. And, in truth, the lesson seems to have been effectual, for we hear no more of this unholy strife for superiority.

This lesson, beloved, of true humility, of condescending interest in the wants and miseries of our brother man, of self-abasement and self-renunciation for the sake of Christ and his people, is one of the hardest for us to learn. Our proud hearts rebel against it. There may be an occasional parade of voluntary humility, as when he who is styled sovereign Pontiff, Vicar of Christ, nay, our Lord God the Pope, ostentatiously washes, once a year, in a golden basin, the feet of beggars. But this is a very different thing from the spirit which Jesus inculcated at the last supper. That was a spirit of unaffected condescension, a ready sympathy with our less favored fellow men, a disposition to look upon the most obscure and degraded as our brethren, and to ex-

* The reasons for placing the contention mentioned in Luke xxii. 24, &c., before this act of the Saviour, are given by Doddridge and Bloomfield.

tend to them that kindly interest which is more precious than the relief of physical suffering. And here do we not all greatly need to attend to our blessed Master's instruction and example? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

The apostle Peter cannot, at first, bring himself to submit to such a condescension from his Saviour. "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" he asked with surprise, and even displeasure. "Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." How true this, brethren, of much that Jesus now does? And how needful and reasonable that we should, patiently and trustingly, await the explanation and development of all his dealings? Let us be faithful to the end, and we shall soon know the reasons of what he hath done, and with each fresh discovery we shall kindle with more fervent love, and break forth into louder praise. "Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." The Lord's assurance to Peter, that if unwashed, he hath no part in him, overcomes, in a moment, his opposition. The apostle, from his first acquaintance with the Lord Jesus, had deeply felt his own sinfulness. And this conviction of personal unworthiness had doubtless much to do with

his strong attachment to that Redeemer who giveth rest to the heavy-laden. When the Saviour, therefore, insists upon the necessity of his cleansing to all who would have any part with him, the disciple's ready heart at once applies the saying to his spiritual defilements. "Dear Lord, I do indeed need to be cleansed and purified. I feel most deeply that I am an unworthy, guilt-stained sinner. Nought do I desire more than to be made pure and holy. But, Lord, the cleansing should be an entire and thorough one. Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Am I not altogether sinful and unclean? Oh! wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin." "Jesus saith to him, he that is washed," (or rather, who hath just come from the bath,) "needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all." The distinction which our Lord here makes is supposed to be that between the entire change, the spiritual new creation of the sinner, first repenting and passing from death unto life; and the daily renewing and forgiveness which the justified need,—on account of their daily short-comings and omissions. The impenitent man, who has been living a godless life, serving the world, or his own lusts and passions, a stranger to divine grace, requires a thorough transformation. He "must be born again." He must be quickened from death in

trespasses and sins. He needs a repentance deep, thorough, and extending back through his life-time. He requires to be cleansed by the Spirit and blood of Christ, as it were, in a bath. He must be "saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." But the reconciled and pardoned child of God, while he has need to confess himself a daily transgressor, to bewail his frequent failures, his many omissions, his inexcusable defects, and can only be cleansed by the same precious blood applied in renewed exercises of penitence and faith; yet is it in his case rather the removal of such partial stains as he has contracted in his walk through this sinful world. In the one case, old things must pass away, all things must become new. In the other, there must be a reviving of what hath been decayed—a washing away of newly contracted defilements—a return from our deviations to the right way. Now the apostles of Christ, with one awful exception, had experienced the great spiritual change, and had been transformed by the renewing of their minds. "Ye are clean," said their Lord, "but not all." They needed not a new creation, for they were already new creatures in Christ Jesus. They were accepted by God through his beloved Son, and counted as clean, through their Redeemer's righteousness. But they needed, from day to day, fresh grace and new forgiveness.

They could not walk through the world without some of its pollutions adhering to their feet. And Christ, therefore, must wash them again and again.

Let us all remember those emphatic words of our Saviour : "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me." While we rejoice that we have a Saviour, that as at this time* the Son of God came to our world to redeem us, let there mingle with our gratulations and thanksgivings the memory of this saying of our Lord. All his gifts and blessings to us are suspended on this condition. We must be *washed* by Christ. We must be cleansed from the guilt and defilement of sin by his most precious blood, and by his freely promised Spirit. Sin is our curse, our malady, our misery, our condemnation. And the only remedy for our guilt-stained souls, is to bathe in that fountain which Christ hath opened for sin and for uncleanness. We must be washed by Jesus, and justified, and sanctified ; for there shall in no wise enter into that holy city, the new Jerusalem, anything that defileth. And the washing which ye need, brethren, who have never experienced the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit of God, is an entire and thorough one. Ye need new hearts, holy dispositions, spiritual affections, humble penitence, lively faith, and entire self-consecration to him

* Season of Nativity.

who bought you with his blood. And without this, Christ shall profit you nothing. On our Savior's return to the table, after this incident, he made known plainly to his disciples, that which he had before hinted at, the treachery of one of their number. "He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." Most startling to them was this strange announcement. With sorrowful astonishment they gaze at one another, "doubting of whom he spake." The false-hearted one, who knew himself to be meant, had art enough to dissemble his emotions. The innocent feel themselves incapable of such an act. Yet their confidence in their brethren is no less firm than in their own integrity; and, troubled beyond measure, they ask their Master in turn, "Lord, is it I?" There is the utterance of truth and sincerity in the appeal. Judas could not speak so until, fearing that he might be noticed as an exception, he also thus addressed his Lord, and received a reply that indicated his Master's perfect acquaintance with his treachery. But the unsuspecting disciples are exceedingly slow to apprehend the Savior's meaning, each feeling it as impossible that his brother could be guilty of such an act as himself. "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom, one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore, beckoned to him, that he should

who it should be of whom he spake." Peter was more anxious than his fellow Apostles to pierce the meaning of this sad announcement. His affectionate heart is even more shocked at an imputation, and he cannot rest until the traitor be exposed, and the rest released from any share in so foul a charge. The warm attachment that prompted him to seek explanation, which our Lord seems to have tested by pointing out Judas still more plainly, bears forth immediately after, when his Lord had spoken of his speedy departure from them. "Si-

Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter saith unto him, Lord, Why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." "I am ready to go with thee, both to prison, and to death." Nought seems now impossible to his ardent affection. Absorbed with filial reverence for his Divine Master, he is ready to face every danger, to defy every foe. Rather than be parted from the Lord Jesus, he would die with him. Oh, how little know we our hearts! How unconscious are we of our weakness and inability to resist temptation. How slow to learn that the secret of steadfastness and perseverance is humble reliance on the grace and strength of God. Except he uphold us, we

are sure to fall. All our sufficiency is of him. But oft we learn this truth only by mortifying failures and disgraceful falls. The excited feelings of many a youthful convert, prompt him to anticipate a ready victory over every obstacle and enemy. All things must yield to his fervor and faith. Though all forsake Jesus, yet will he cleave to him. Often, perhaps, he looks with contempt at the slower pace and less ardent zeal of more experienced Christians, and exults in his more fervent religion and more vehement affection. But "Let not him that putteth on his armor, boast himself as he that taketh it off." It is one thing to anticipate danger from afar, another to face it in reality. In the case of the sincere and whole-hearted, it may be hoped that the promise of Jesus will be finally realized. "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." Meanwhile, there will probably be many grievous falls and sore discomfitures, ere the victory be won. "Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." What a damp, this answer, upon the Apostle's enthusiasm! How different a reply from what he probably expected! In his own heart he thinks the saying of Jesus harsh and unjust, and wonders at his Lord's unkind suspicions. But had he taken it aright,

how merciful a warning would it have proved! How would he have gone forth armed for the conflict with evil, and enabled in divine strength to stand! There is one, brethren, who knows us better than we know ourselves, who is acquainted with all the depths of our deceitful hearts, who understands with what enemies we must cope in our spiritual warfare, and how little strength we have to meet them. He bids us, "Be not high-minded, but fear." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." When our confidence is highest, he warns us of an approaching downfall. When our step is boldest, he points to the snare and ambush. When we look with impatience and contempt upon the stumblings and failures of brethren, he warns, "Consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Let us learn to place our confidence, not in our own resolution, fortitude and steadfastness, but in him who is our righteousness and strength. Let us lean upon his promised grace, and follow him in humble reliance and self-renouncing faith, and we shall be made more than conquerors. He will adapt the grace to the trial, "And as our days, so shall our strength be." And though, whither he hath gone, we may not be able to follow him now, yet we shall follow him hereafter. When the time cometh, he will smooth our way, he will renew our strength, he will take us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also.

THE DENIAL.

LUKE XXII. 61, 62.

" And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

The name of the Apostle Peter is not more widely known, than his shameful denial of his Master. His grievous fall is associated, in every mind, with his history. His sin hath been written as it were with a pen of iron, and wherever the gospel hath been preached, is had in remembrance. His sin indeed seems to have affected the minds of men far more deeply than his repentance. The one hath been treasured up, while the other hath been lightly passed over. May we not consider this an evidence of the indelible character of sin. Here we notice how the act of a few moments hath outlived centuries; is now, after such a lapse of time, fresh and vivid, and known in the uttermost parts of the earth. Our sins are not committed indeed under circumstances so peculiar and remarkable, but have we not reason to suppose that they partake the same lasting and permanent character. Will they not revive in after periods

of life to disquiet and alarm, and unless blotted out by the blood of that just One whom Peter denied, will they not come forth from the sleep of ages, swift witnesses against us in the day of account?

The fact of the grievous fall of Peter having been so widely divulged, is a striking proof of one characteristic peculiar to the Holy Scriptures. Of all books ever written the Bible is the most impartial. No matter by whom a sin is committed, it is described without the least attempt at concealment or palliation. The characters which are exhibited as on the whole most acceptable to God, are not represented as faultless. No arts of rhetoric are employed to hide or lessen their delinquencies. There is no resort to the language of indiscriminate panegyric, or unqualified commendation. Good men appear on the plain unvarnished page of Holy Writ *only as men*, frail and sinful men, not angels of light. There is but one perfect life recorded in the volume of God; the life of Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

Is the difference between the best examples of Scripture, and the lives which are handed down to us by other historians, attributable to the greater excellency of the latter? The biographer presents to us a character, according to his own ideas of perfection, without flaw or blemish. The sacred

writer shows us the very best of whom he speaks betrayed into sin. But the distinction is that between sober reality and flattering eulogy. And the absence of all these arts of coloring, of all attempts at concealment or excuse, is part of the simplicity and truthfulness of the book of God. This most lamentable fall of one of the very chiefest of those Apostles by whom the gospel was spread over the earth, is recorded by each of the four Evangelists, without a syllable of remark or extenuation. They relate it with as much simplicity and honesty as they record the conduct of Caiaphas or Pilate. And it is worthy of note that none of the accounts are more full and impartial than that of St. Mark, whose gospel is supposed to have been written under the eye of Peter himself.

The sin was in truth one of the most aggravated of which a servant of God could be guilty. It was grievously enhanced by the peculiar favors extended to the Apostle during years of familiar intercourse. Peter had been called from his fishing boat to be a disciple and Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Beyond even his brethren he had been favored. He had been one of his Lord's confidential friends, admitted to his private retirements, when nearly all the others were excluded. No token of affectionate confidence had been withheld from him. When his Master would raise the

corpse, he took Peter with him to the death-chamber. When he would put on his garments of light, and shine in the celestial splendors of the transfiguration, he chose Peter to be a witness of the divine marvel. At the still more solemn and heart-affecting scene which had just transpired in Gethsemane, Peter was also present. With a single exception, no disciple had received such evidences of his Lord's affection. And the promises made to him, in recompense of his faith and confession of his Master's Messiahship, had been, as we have seen, remarkable for their fullness and richness. Whether we regard the strong bonds of friendship, or the opportunities enjoyed of witnessing his Lord's mighty powers, there would seem every thing to confirm him in his steadfastness. If any disciple is to deny Jesus, surely not he who walked with him on the waves of the storm-lashed sea, who would have reared a tabernacle for him on the Holy Mount, who had so nobly confessed him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God; who had witnessed him prostrate on the cold earth, bathed in the bloody sweat, praying with strong crying and supplications that if it were the Father's will, the bitter cup might pass. Yet this favored one it is, who disclaims all knowledge of his condescending and affectionate Master.

The sin was aggravated by the Apostle's previous protestations of unalterable adhesion. -He

had just uttered unsolicited assurances of his attachment. He volunteered most solemn pledges of his unwavering fidelity. It is the very Apostle who has just been protesting "Though I should die with thee, yet will not I deny thee." "I will lay down my life for thy sake." "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both unto prison and to death;" who, a few hours after, is so anxious to rid himself of the imputation of being Christ's follower.

The sin was enhanced by his Lord's warnings. The Saviour took care to inform him of the approaching danger, to remind him of his weakness, to point out the very snare into which he should fall. To be forewarned is to be fore-armed. He had been assured that "Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat;" that the very same night would be the time of peril, when all the disciples should be offended at what befell their Lord; and Peter more than the rest; yet the voice of warning availed nothing.

The sin was made exceeding sinful by the solemnities of that eventful night. He had been present at the paschal feast, and at the institution of the Lord's supper. He had just received from his Master's hand the broken bread, emblem of his body about to be sacrificed, and the cup, expressive of the blood that should be shed for the remission of sins. From this holy celebration, this

exhibition of Christ's unspeakable tenderness and love, from listening to those inimitable discourses which then fell from the Saviour's lips, he could, a few hours after, abjure that Saviour's name. It would seem as if, whatever the danger at other times, he would now be strong in faith.

The sin was aggravated by the distressing circumstances of his Lord. It was "the hour of his enemies and the power of darkness." Now, those calamities of which the Apostles had been so reluctant to hear, and at the prospect of which the Redeemer's soul had been sorrowful and very heavy, began to thicken around him. The Son of Man has been betrayed and given into the hand of his enemies. He has been apprehended by the arm of violence, and dragged as if he were the vilest criminal to the judgment-seat. They "take counsel together to take away his life." "Fat bulls of Bashan compass him in on every side." His "soul is among lions." In the crowd around him, from the high Priest down to his meanest vassal, he sees no friendly countenance. Fierce enmity, cruel jealousy, implacable rage, flash from every eye. Surely this is a time, when if there be a heart beating with sympathy and affection for the persecuted man, that sympathy and affection would be most grateful to his wounded spirit. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Where now are the friends of Jesus,

where his brethren, where those disciples whom he counted no less dear than mother, and sister, and brother? At the outburst of danger "all forsook him and fled." And though one hath followed him to the judgment-hall, and is present to witness his contumelious and cruel treatment, yet is he there, not to comfort and cheer, but to inflict still deeper wounds upon the innocent sufferer. Can Peter behold that meek and lowly one, dumb as a lamb before its shearers, patient and uncomplaining, deserted and friendless, and not hasten to his side, be the risk what it may? Can he whisper no word of comfort in that ear which must listen to so many taunts and calumnies? Can he not assure his Master, that, amid this throng of blasphemers and enemies, he hath one staunch friend, one reverent and affectionate follower? Can he not renew some of those protestations of inviolable attachment, whereof he was so lavish a little time ago? How grateful now to that Master's heart the assurance—"Lord, I am ready to go with thee both to prison and to death." But no, Peter hath not now a word of sympathy or reverence. It is not enough for him even to witness at a distance, and in silence, his Master's danger. If he open his mouth, it is not to confess or to comfort, but to disown and renounce his Lord. Rather than be involved in his condemnation, he disclaims him utterly. How much

less heinous would have been the denial of Christ, in the noon-day of his fame, when he was working wonders, feeding thousands, surrounded by admiring crowds, than now, in his seemingly forlorn, friendless, and defenceless condition ?

The *manner* of the denial also renders it more glaringly hateful. It was *a repeated* renunciation of Christ. Three times at least, and as some commentators suppose, oftener, he disclaimed all knowledge of Jesus. Not conscience-stricken by one such act of baseness, he persists in the cowardly falsehood. Nay, to untruth and unkindness he adds perjury ; calling God to witness his sincerity, while uttering so wicked a lie. And when a single oath sufficed not to deceive his questioners, he multiplied imprecations. "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man." Oh, what a sad and dreadful change ! Is this the same Peter who aforetime had exclaimed with such affecting confidence : "Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Is this the mouth which uttered the memorable confession—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" which could appeal to his Master for the sincerity of his abandonment of every earthly hope ; "Lo, we have forsaken all and followed thee !" and which promised so earnestly fidelity to the very last ? "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." Lord, what is

man? How unstable his resolves, how deceitful and treacherous his heart! Except thou uphold us, how suddenly, dreadfully, irretrievably may we fall! Surely our own strength is perfect weakness: all our sufficiency is of God.

Such was the character of Peter's sin—a sin of the most atrocious nature, enhanced by many fearful aggravations. None of the evangelists undertake in any manner to excuse it. It is not therefore our duty to seek after apology or extenuation. Yet let it be borne in mind, in comparing this offence with those of other men, that there is indicated in our Lord's warnings an assault of the great adversary, of peculiar vehemence. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." He seems, too, to have been left for a time to himself, the succors of divine grace having been withdrawn, in order to humble him, and to prove him, and to show him what was in his own heart. Christ prayed for him indeed that "his faith might not fail," utterly fail, so as never to return and recover itself. In answer to this prayer of Christ was granted his sincere and pungent repentance. But for that blessed intercession he had been a cast-away and a reprobate. But in the hour of temptation he was abandoned to his own powers of resistance, that his unhappy fall might forcibly remind himself, his brethren, and all Christians of

every age, of the weakness of the flesh, of the sure downfall of pride, of the inability of man in his best estate, without divine grace, to stand in the evil day.

It is well for us to observe attentively *the precursors* to Peter's fall. One of these was *self-confidence*. He pays little heed to his Master's warnings of the impending danger. He protests his constancy in language that seems boastful and vain-glorious. "Though all men forsake Thee, yet will I never forsake thee." As if he were above the frailties of other men, and superior to his brethren in constancy, faithfulness, and devotion. Connected with this self-dependence is a *spirit of indolence and slumber*. When his Master bids him to watch and pray—when that Master is himself wrestling in his agony, Peter is supinely sleeping. The warnings which he had just received, the divine instructions of his Lord, the solemnities of the last supper, the manifest burden of grief and anxiety oppressing his Master's soul, and the earnest injunctions laid upon him; all are insufficient to rouse him to vigilance and prayer. From the Saviour's words and manner it is evident that some awful event is now impending. Never had he appeared so greatly agitated, so exceeding sorrowful. The Disciples might plainly perceive that this night would be no common night. The crisis of their Master's history is at

hand. Now he needs, if ever, the sympathy and the assistance of his followers. Now are his followers themselves in the midst of perils. Yet at this time, so ominous and threatening, so solemn and eventful, Peter cannot watch with his Lord one hour. While that Lord is waging his terrible conflict, and fainting under the mountain burden of our sins; while his thrilling supplications startle the silent shades of Gethsemane, and his sweat, like drops of blood, rains upon the cold earth, Peter is buried in careless repose. Is it strange that he who could sleep at Gethsemane should deny his Lord in the judgment hall?

Then, when roused by the irruption of Judas and his armed bands into the garden, to a sense of the danger; instead of arming himself with the same mind of patience and fortitude, which his divine Master exhibited, he first, in his impetuosity, draws the sword in that Master's defence; and then, his hasty courage vanishing, flies panic-stricken from the spot. Soon after, anxious to know his fate, he summons resolution to follow him, but it is *afar off*. He is evidently fearful of being discovered as a friend of Jesus, and there is naught like fervent and self-sacrificing affection in his whole deportment.

The Christian, dear brethren, who is high-minded and self-confident, who has no ear for the earnest cautions and warnings of Holy Writ, who

despises the danger against which he is bidden to guard, who has no heart for the vigilance, circumspection and self-denial of his calling, who sleeps when Christ bids him watch and pray, who is little affected by his Saviour's agony and love stronger than death; who is listless and supine after solemn ordinances; who would follow Jesus indeed, but *not near* enough to incur the world's scorn and enmity; that Christian, it is much to be feared, will end with denying and renouncing his Master.

But while Peter's sin was of so dark a hue, it was not of long continuance. "He was overtaken," as the Scripture express it, "in a fault." Off his guard, unready and unarmed, he was assailed by a sudden and violent onset of the enemy, and dashed rudely to the ground. But his conduct on this occasion was a marked exception to the tenor of his life. For this short period he appears altogether another man from the warm-hearted, affectionate, devoted follower of Christ, which he evidently was before and after. There is this wide and marked distinction between the sins of the child of God, and of the ungodly. In the one case they are interruptions of the usual life, yieldings to sudden temptation, surprises of an ever-watchful enemy in seasons of neglect and remissness. In the other case, they are the fruits of the habitual temper and disposition, manifestations of the man's true spirit, such conduct as

flows naturally and necessarily from the state of his heart. In the one case, lapses from the right way will be the occasion of sincere grief and self-reproach. They will be truly lamented, freely confessed, bitterly bewailed. In the other case, they will be attended by no compunction or regret, no humiliation before God, no earnest resolves for the future. In the one case, there will be a looking unto Jesus, a keen sense of the dis-honor and injury done to a gracious Lord; a meeting, as it were, of His reproachful glance. In the other case there may be a regret for the detection of the sin or for its consequences, a selfish dread of punishment, but no true compunction or sorrow for unkind treatment of a heavenly benefactor. If we mourn for this great Apostle's deplorable fall, if we venture not to excuse the turpitude and wickedness of his conduct, we must be at the same time impressed by the sincerity and heartiness of his repentance. The same hour which witnessed his ungrateful denial of the Lord, with oaths and curses, witnessed also his tears of contrition and groans of sorrowful regret.

Turning our thoughts to the Apostle's repen-tance, we notice first, that it was *prompt and speedy*. It was no after thought of months or years, no slow and *late* return to a better mind, but it followed immediately the offence.

Neither was it *deferred* until *the present danger*

was overpast. The Apostle waited not until the clouds that now lowered over his Master's head, were dispersed. It was not after his triumphant resurrection and glorious ascension that his relentings were kindled, but in the time of his deepest depression, while yet a helpless prisoner in the hands of his enemies, put to plead as a culprit before an unjust tribunal, and about to be sentenced to an ignominious death.

Neither was Peter's repentance wrung from him by providential *affliction and impending death.* The hand of the Almighty was not laid heavily upon him to extort confession and supplication. He was free to depart, to go back to his former occupation. The vengeance of Christ's enemies would scarcely then pursue his humble, inoffensive followers to their cottages and fishing boats. So far as his earthly prospects are concerned, it would seem for Peter's advantage now to cut loose altogether from the ship-wrecked and sinking cause of Jesus of Nazareth. Again, one of the most observable things in the Apostle's penitence, is the effect produced by *the eye of his injured Master.* It was in the very midst of his strange and horrible imprecations, that "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." Probably the distance between them was such that he expected not his words of denial to reach that Master's ear. But *that look* assures him that every word hath been

noted. He finds that Jesus, in the midst of his enemies, accused, threatened, and tried for his life, is yet heedful of his disciple's language. "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." It was at the very moment when the crowing of the cock brought back to his mind the Saviour's warning, and all the solemnity and tenderness of his manner at the celebration of the supper. It was *a look of reproach*. "Art thou also against me, Peter? Is it not enough that I am now so sorely pressed by my enemies—that insults are heaped so unsparingly upon my head—that my face is exposed to shame and spitting, that my hour is come, and the Son of Man betrayed into the hands of enemies? Is it not enough to be reviled and threatened by my persecutors? Must I be denied by thee, my own familiar friend, with whom I have so often taken sweet counsel, and from whom I have received such strong and repeated protestations of attachment?" It was *a look of sorrow and pity*. "Unhappy man, has it come to this? Hast thou so yielded to ~~sorrows~~ fears as to become a very apostate, a false and perfidious man, a profane denier of Him whom thine own mouth hath named the Son of the living God? Oh! thy wretched downfall pierces me more sharply than the scourge; presses upon me more heavily than impending death."

But it was also *a look of love*. No anger flashed from those tearful eyes, no indignant sur-

prise gleamed from those mild features. "Peter, thou art still my disciple, my affection for thee is undiminished, my soul yearns for thy return; though thou hast denied me so unkindly and ungratefully, yet I will not forsake or renounce thee. There is still a place for thee in this bleeding heart—there is still healing for thee in my wounds and stripes." Under that look of gentle reproof and reproachful tenderness, the Apostle's heart melted in a moment. There rushes back upon him a flood of touching recollections. He now appears to himself a monster of ingratitude and baseness. He cannot bear that glance. It is more terrible to him than all the swords and weapons of the armed multitude. In an agony of grief he hastens from the spot. He seeks a retirement, where he can pour out unrestrained, the gushings of his troubled soul. "He went out and wept bitterly." This is all which the evangelists tell us, but it is enough:—it reveals to us a depth of intense emotion, a sorrow unfeigned and overflowing. His repentance was correspondent with his sin; the one no less pungent and sincere, than the other was hateful and aggravated. How true his repentance, his after life is the most conclusive evidence. Peter never again denied his Lord, never wavered in temptation's hour, never shrunk back in time of danger.

Is it only, brethren, in such a scene as the hall

of Caiaphas that Christ can be denied ? Was it only when he was in the flesh, that he could be disowned and renounced ? Is not Christ still with us ? Confessed and followed by a faithful few ; disowned by treacherous friends and unstable disciples ; mocked at by an unbelieving world ? Doth he not expressly say, " He that is not with me is against me, and whoso gathereth not with me scattereth." Many there are now, who virtually deny the Lord who bought them. To be ashamed of Christ, brethren, to be unwilling to be known and marked as his disciple, to shrink from the reproach of his cross, to shun that censorious notice, that displeasure of the ungodly, which would attend an honest, manly, consistent, uncompromising profession and practice of Christianity, is to deny him. Though Jesus hath ascended into the heavens, yet hath he left here on earth his religion, his doctrine, his church, and his ordinances ; and as we treat them, we are really treating him. " He that heareth you," is his language to the seventy, and to all who follow them in their work, " heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me." Peter denied his Lord for an hour : have none of you denied him for successive years ? Peter denied his Lord under the pressure of imminent danger, when to stand by Jesus was apparently to share his cross. But if you deny him, it is in the time of prosperity, when no persecution

rages and no death impends ; when the fires of martyrdom are quenched, and the dungeon no longer yawns for the faithful confessor. Peter denied his Lord, but speedily, earnestly repented. Perhaps you have never sorrowed for your unkind treatment of him who died for you. You, it is possible, have never felt a single regret, or shed a single tear, on account of your persevering and unthankful rejection of your Redeemer. But remember that he hath said : " Whosoever denieth me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." Remember that they who have sinned like Peter, if they would find mercy of the Lord in that day, must, like him, earnestly and unfeignedly repent.

THE RESTORATION TO THE APOSTLESHIP.

JOHN XXI. 17.

"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he saith unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

The interval between the death, and resurrection of our divine Saviour, must have been to his faithful Disciples a season of consternation and gloom. Their high raised hopes seem utterly defeated: their sanguine anticipations quenched in the midnight darkness of the grave. He to whom they had clung with fond attachment and implicit confidence is now the tenant of the sepulchre, and "as yet they knew not the saying that he must rise again from the dead." They feel themselves objects of suspicion and hatred to his malignant enemies, and have reason to fear that the hostility which hath wreaked its vengeance upon the Master, will not wholly pass over the Disciples. But of this little band, whose feelings would be less enviable than those of the Apostle Peter? Not only did he share in the common calamity, and participate in the anxiety and grief

that weighed upon the hearts of his brethren, but he had his private sorrows more pungent still. To the general consternation was added, in his case, the distressing memory of that scene in the hall of Caiaphas, when, for the last time, he had seen face to face his injured Master. With every recollection of Jesus would be united the melancholy circumstances of his arraignment and death, and the thought that he himself, a favored follower and friend, had done so much to embitter the last moments of one so kind and gracious. What an interview was that, for the final one! To think that the last words from the Disciple's lips which met that Master's ear, were the scornful denial and the impious curse. To recall the last look of that injured Master, when his meek, reproachful glance rested with such sorrowful meaning upon his false and ungrateful Apostle. To think that Jesus was now beyond the assurances of his repentance for this unkind and wicked renunciation, and that, however sincere his regret, he could not convey it to him whom he had wronged. There can scarce be a more poignant remorse than that which results from the conviction of unkindness to the departed, to those who are now beyond our reach, inaccessible to the expressions of our regret, or to the offers of reparation. Such must have been the nature of Peter's grief in this mournful interval. If he could but come again to

his Master, clasp his feet, confess his offence, and assure him of his unfeigned contrition, what a relief to his burdened soul. But that Master is no more. He hath died with those grievous words ringing in his ear, with that odious ingratitude pressing heavily upon his heart. And often, at the thought, the Apostle's grief is renewed, and his tears flow with increased bitterness.

But at length dawns that auspicious morn, when the Prince of Life burst the bands of death, and came forth more than a Conqueror from the tomb. That grave, so secure a prison of frail mortals; which holds the mighty ones of earth motionless and submissive in its dark recesses; which no human wisdom can evade, and no human strength can overcome, yields at length its victory. He who consented to lie there for a little time, hath triumphed gloriously, and hath set his foot upon the neck of the vanquished King of Terrors. Henceforth the grave is no longer appalling to them that trust in Him, who is "the Resurrection and the Life."

The first intimation that reaches the Apostles that something strange had occurred, and that their Master's tomb is open, is from Mary Magdalene. Her affectionate zeal had anticipated her companions, with whom she had appointed to visit the sepulchre on the morning of the first day of the week; and brought her, while it was yet dark, to

the place whither tended all their hearts. "She seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." Regarding only her earthly attachment to her revered Master, and forgetful of his own pre-intimations of the great event of that day, she can only mourn for what appears a violation of the sacredness of his grave. From the fact that Peter was now with John, we gather that he was determined to cast in his lot altogether with the disciples of Jesus, and to meet any danger that might come upon them for their Master's sake. The eager Apostles hasten with all speed to the tomb in Joseph's garden. John, first arriving, looks in, and ascertains that it is empty, Peter coming up immediately after, with his characteristic boldness, enters the abode of death. While the body of Jesus is missing, he yet notices that his grave-clothes are there, folded up with a care that betokens no hasty and furtive removal. Here were evident indications of deliberation, however the grave had become vacant. When John likewise entered and gazed upon these remarkable signs, conviction flashed upon his mind of the great and glorious event which had taken place. But Peter's heart was not yet open to this

truth, and he turned away from the scene perplexed and troubled. Soon another, and still more startling announcement reaches the assembled Apostles, from the company of women unto whom two angels had manifested themselves in the forsaken tomb, "But their words seemed to them as idle tales," too wonderful to be credited. Peter's anxiety leads him however again to the sepulchre, but no angels are now visible, and every thing wears the same aspect as before. "He departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass." But as the hours glide on, the tidings thicken. Next comes Mary Magdalene again with the good news that the Lord himself had appeared unto her. She who was last at the cross and first at the tomb, had been first favored with the sight of her risen Lord. And before the evening of that blessed Easter, when he suddenly appeared in the midst of his gathered disciples, three other manifestations are recorded. One of these was to Peter himself. Of this interview, which we should suppose to have been one of the most touching and remarkable, no particulars have been made known. All that we find in the New Testament is a simple statement of the fact. When the two disciples, unto whom Christ had revealed himself on the way to Emmaus, returned with joyful haste to their brethren, they were encountered with the salutation, "The Lord is risen in-

deed and hath appeared unto Simon." And this appearance was so much noted, that when the Apostle Paul refers to the resurrection of the Saviour he places it first. "And that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." Silent therefore though the Evangelists have all been concerning what took place at this appearance, it is plain that much importance was attached to it. We would fain learn more of this meeting. Gladly would we know what the Lord said to his fallen Apostle, what kind and consolatory expressions he used to reassure and comfort his troubled heart, and how he spake to him words of pardon and peace. Gladly would we know what was the demeanor of the humbled and penitent Peter. Was he speechless with deep emotion, only able to cast himself in abasement at his Master's feet, scarce venturing to meet that eye which when it fell upon him last had pierced him like a sword? Or did he pour forth contrite acknowledgments of his offence, and fervently supplicate for the restoration of that favor which he had so justly forfeited. Of all this we are ignorant. But we can well understand that this manifestation of the risen Saviour to the most guilty of his Apostles, except the traitor Judas, was intended to assure both himself and his brethren that he was freely forgiven, and would be fully restored to his Apostleship.

And in the privacy of the interview, not a single witness present, we may perceive the tenderness of our Lord to his erring disciple. He spared him the pain and confusion that might have overwhelmed him at first meeting his Saviour, in the presence of all his brethren. Strange though it may be, yet the penitent can meet his offended God and expose to him the foulness of his sin, more freely and unrestrainedly, than to a fellow mortal. Let the conscience-stricken and guilty-burdened carry their load of sin at once to Jesus, and they shall find rest to their souls.

The full re-investment of Peter with that pastoral and apostolic office, which he had so justly forfeited, was reserved, however, for another occasion. In common with his brethren, he had received, indeed, the high and holy commission from his risen Saviour on the evening of the resurrection day. But as he had so grievously apostatized, his restoration needed to be more marked and particular. During the period that intervened between the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, the Apostles returned to their old occupation, and toiled to procure the means of subsistence. Again, we find them in a fishing-boat on that lake, upon whose shores they had been nurtured, and upon whose waters they had so often sailed with their beloved Master. The scene, we should suppose, must have recalled to them many of the memora-

ble incidents of their intercourse with him. Here it was that Jesus found them, and called them from their craft to be his close and constant followers. These waters, now calm and peaceful, they had seen, when lashed by the tempest, and threatening to engulf them, stilled in a moment by his word. On these very waves they had seen him walk as on dry land, in the wild midnight storm. On these shores he had fed, with a few loaves and fishes, the fainting multitudes ; and from many a well-remembered spot had they listened to his divine instructions, and wondered at his gracious words. Everything, we might suppose, would here bring Jesus to their minds. Yet when, after a night of unsuccessful toil, a form appears in the grey light of early morn upon the strand—they at first knew him not. Like Joseph, he made himself strange to his brethren, until the time of discovery arrived. They suspect not, as they pursue, disheartened, their unrequited task, that the stranger on the shore is Jesus. They understood not that their want of success was of his ordering, so that when the net, so oft drawn up empty, cast again at his bidding, should enclose a great multitude of fishes, they might attribute the abundant draught entirely to him. So Jesus is often near when his people suspect him not. He may come to them in another guise than they look for, and wear a strange aspect. It may be long

before they discover that the form which, perhaps, they feared and shrunk from, is verily their Lord. And sometimes, when his ministers are toiling long and vainly, and the gospel net again and again comes up empty, it is because he is preparing a large ingathering of precious souls in a way that shall prove the power to be evidently of God and not of man.

The unknown stranger on the shore, inquires in a kind and friendly manner, respecting their success ; and when the answer is unfavorable, bids them cast the net on the right side of the ship, and they should find. "They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved, saith unto Peter, It is the Lord." The same conviction, we should think, must have struck the minds of all. The circumstances would powerfully recall former scenes on that lake ; and above all, the time when the four Apostles were called by their Master to leave all and follow him. Then, as now, there had been a long, laborious night of profitless toil. Then, as now, at the word of Jesus, they had tried another cast, and had scarce been able to draw their nets for the abundant contents. Surely the form, so unexpectedly appearing on the solitary shore, must be that of him who had promised to make them "fishers of men." But upon no heart would be

made a deeper impression than on Peter's. He would recall the confession of sinfulness wherewith he fell at that Master's feet ; the awe and reverence wherewith he regarded the nearness of one so holy ; his entreaty to Christ to depart from him, not knowing what he said ; and the merciful condescension wherewith he was answered and encouraged. He would remember with what warmth of gratitude and zeal he then devoted himself to that Master's service, determined that nought but death should part them. And he would also think how strangely and sadly he had failed to carry out his resolutions and vows. Oh, how humbling and yet how profitable may it prove to a professed follower of Christ, who hath wandered from the way of righteousness, to have recalled and revived the circumstances of his first acquaintance with his Redeemer ; his early vows of obedience ; his emotions of gratitude and love when he entered into the bonds of the gospel covenant. Let some providential event, or some still small voice of the Spirit, whisper again to his soul the solemn promises then made to his Saviour and his God ; the feelings that burned in the breast ; the fervent contrition ; the earnest purpose ; the sense of redeeming love ; the conviction of the world's vanity, and the soul's preciousness, and the Redeemer's grace ; and through the divine blessing, the erring and straying will return with

weeping and supplication to him whom they had aforetime vowed to serve and follow. The Apostle Peter, in the fervor of his renewed devotion to the Lord who had dealt so mercifully with him, casts himself into the sea to come to him the more quickly. Yet, neither himself nor his brethren who followed him in the boat, "durst ask him who art thou, knowing that it was the Lord." There seems, indeed, to be manifest in the deportment of the Apostles towards their Master, after his resurrection, a greater reverence and awe than before. While they venerated him before as the Messiah, he had yet dwelt with them as a man. Now, they look with astonishment as well as love upon him who had burst the fetters of the grave, and returned to them from the invisible world ; who showed himself to them in a manner so sudden and mysterious ; who came and went like a being not of the earth, earthly ; and upon whose countenance and form there rested an almost celestial dignity.

Passing by other interesting particulars of this remarkable interview, let us devote a brief attention to the searching questions proposed by the Saviour to the Apostle whose life we are reviewing. "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord :

knowest that I love thee. He saith unto Feed my lambs."

'he question must deeply have agitated the ent Apostle. Well might Jesus ask, "Simon, t thou me?" Now, indeed, Simon was with in the posture of an humble, affectionate dis-

But, how short a time since, had he denied abjured his Lord? What had become of his er professions of attachment in the time of er? None had more strongly vowed fidelity ove. None had so unkindly and ungratefully ted their Master's tenderness. Dost thou indeed, cherish towards me, Simon, a true tion? Is there reality in thy love? Will it roof against the day of adversity, and the of persecution and peril? Lovest thou me than these, thy brethren? Dost thou still to be the most zealous and faithful of all my vers?" Peter could not but feel how justly served this appeal. His answer breathes a ent spirit from that which he had aforetime ited. It is in a manifestly chastened and ued tone. "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that e thee." He does not say, "I love thee than these." He ventures to arrogate no riority over his brethren in this respect. He als to his Lord's own knowledge for the sin- y of his attachment. "Thou, Lord, hast ed me that thou knowest my heart better

than I know it myself. I presume not to boast, as once, my warm affection. I am truly conscious of my flagrant ingratitude. I confess myself a grievous backslider and apostate. But, Lord, dost thou not still find this heart, so open to thy piercing eye, beating with love and reverence towards thee?" The Saviour answers not directly the appeal, but he admits its truth when he says to him, "Feed my lambs." This is as much as to say, "Yes, Peter, I am so persuaded of the sincerity of thy penitence and love, that I confide to thee again the pastoral charge. I give into thy care those sheep for which I laid down my life, and thus bestow the greatest possible mark of my confidence. And if thou dost indeed love me, prove it by thy watchfulness, zeal and care as a shepherd of the flock. 'Feed my lambs.' Condescend to the weakest and feeblest of my people. Despise not the little ones, and dispense to those whom I have bought with my blood, the scriptural instruction and unwearied labors which are required for their salvation."

The same gigantic, anti-Christian despotism which hath perverted our Saviour's former language to this Apostle, as if meant to make a frail mortal the foundation Rock of the Church, instead of Christ himself, the elect and precious corner-stone; hath been equally anxious to wrest from these words of Christ an interpretation fa-

vorale to its ends. When Christ said to Peter, "Feed my sheep," we are told, he gave him the rule and oversight of the whole Church, and made him universal pastor, with unlimited powers. Indeed! How happens it then, that in the subsequent Apostolic history, we never read more of this immense grant of spiritual authority? How happens it that Peter never presumed to exercise his just dominion, and that his fellow Apostles never indicate any conviction that they are merely his delegates and servants? Throughout their whole subsequent history, we find them administering as brethren, the affairs of the Church, and taking counsel together in perfect equality, as alike the Apostles of Christ. No! the Church is not Peter's Church, nor the Church of Peter's successors, if any such there be. It is the Church of Christ. "*Feed my sheep.*" It was the Saviour's grace, at this time, to unite Peter again with his brethren, in the pastoral charge of the flock. If it be asked why this is said to this one Apostle, and not to his brethren also, the answer is obvious: Because this one Apostle had denied his Lord, and the others had not. Thus, he had justly forfeited all claim to the Apostleship. It needed some special token of his Master's confidence, to assure him and his brethren that he was reinstated. It was not necessary to renew to those who had never forfeited the pastoral trust, the same

commission. But it was indispensable that it should be reconveyed to him, and that in a manner most deeply to impress his heart. And what is the injunction? "*Feed my sheep.*" And how are they to be fed? With saving truth—"truth as it is in Jesus;" with the bread of life, the pure gospel, the teaching of God as it is given uncorrupt in his own blessed word. Even if it had been, what it is not, a committal of the whole flock of Jesus to this Apostle, or to his successors, it would have been a committal of them to be fed and taught, and guided in the way to heaven; not to be ruled with a rod of iron; not to be seduced into idolatry; not to be poisoned with streams of falsehood and deceit; not to have the traditions of men imposed instead of the commandments of God; not to be debarred access to the word of life; not to be imprisoned, hunted, anathematized, and burned at the stake, if they choose to withdraw their necks from the yoke of bondage. Let those who would derive any authority from these words of Jesus to his disciple, see to it, that they discover what it is to *feed Christ's sheep*; that they prove shepherds and not wolves; and consider the Apostle's own address in his epistle to the elders or presbyters of the Church. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as

being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." *

The threefold repetition of our Lord's question was intended to bring back vividly to the mind of the Apostle, his threefold denial. Well might Jesus ask again and again, to be assured of the fidelity and attachment of one who had again and again renounced him. With intense feeling the Apostle appeals to his Lord's omniscience for satisfaction of these reasonable doubts. "Peter was grieved, because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me. And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee." And now the Saviour shows, in the most decisive way, his confidence in this profession, by not only renewing the pastoral charge, "Feed my sheep," but by promising the Apostle, as the close of his earthly service, the crown of martyrdom. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest : but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me." Thus Peter was called again to follow

* 1 Peter v. 2, 3.

Jesus, reinvested with the forfeited office of an Apostle, and assured that his Saviour would yet grant him the high privilege of proving the sincerity of his love, by laying down his life in his service. Suppose, brethren, the same searching question to be proposed to us, by the same Saviour, " Lovest thou me ?" What could some of you answer, who are yet strangers to his converting grace, who have never even acknowledged him as Master, or vowed to him allegiance ? You do not even profess to love the Lord who bought you. What could you answer, unstable and back-sliding disciple ? Is there not cause enough for the Saviour, whose covenant you have broken, to remind you of your once plighted faith, and ask, " Lovest thou me ?" What could you answer, who have been, so far as man can judge, true and faithful, apparently holding the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end ? As you look back with shame and confusion of face upon the past, as you think how much that Saviour hath done for you, and how little you have done for him, recount your failures, short comings, and provocations, do you not find also cause why Christ should probe you with the same question ? Still it is the privilege of the sincere disciple, while conscious of weakness, perverseness, ingratitude, unprofitableness ; while mourning, coldness of heart, languor of zeal, remissness of service, to

appeal to the Searcher of hearts ; “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.” “Thou knowest, Lord, that it is my earnest, supreme desire to live to thy glory, and follow thy blessed footsteps. Thou art dearer to me than the world, with its hollow show and lying vanities ; dearer to me than my own self-will and pleasure ; dearer to me than silver and gold, than honors and riches ; dearer even than kindred and friends, and all on earth that is precious. But if we do trust and hope that we might so appeal to the heart searcher, let us remember the test to which our affection is to be brought. “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Prove the sincerity of your love by unreserved obedience. And if you have returned to the great Bishop and Shepherd of your souls, cherish a true regard for his flock, and especially for the lambs of that flock. Christian parent, to you the Saviour speaks as well as to his ministers. “Lovest thou me ? Feed my lambs.” And if any of us are disposed to acquiesce, with indifference and unconcern, in the conviction that we are indeed destitute of this principle of heaven-derived affection to our Redeemer, oh, let us call to mind the emphatic Scripture—“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha.”

PENTECOST.

ACTS II. 37.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Hitherto we have known the Apostle Peter as a follower and companion of the Lord Jesus. He hath been in constant attendance upon his divine Master, enjoying the high privilege of listening to his instructions, witnessing his miracles, and uniting with him in prayer and devotion. He has been permitted to study, as closely as he will, that most perfect example of spotless life, and to imbibe, from intimate companionship and unrestricted intercourse, a portion of his pure and lovely spirit. But this, as we should suppose most delightful season, was but a preparation-time for the great work to which Peter was destined. He had been in a course of education, under his Master's eye, for the future labors and trials of his arduous office. From his Saviour's lips he had been gathering the noblest lessons of truth and wisdom. In his example he had seen the true pattern of Christianity, the model to be presented for imitation to redeemed men. Of the great events through

which redemption was accomplished, he had been a close and attentive witness—and, now, he could testify to them with perfect sincerity, and with a strong conviction and earnestness that must persuade his hearers. None are really useful as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord who have not been trained by himself. There is a school of humble discipleship, and experimental knowledge of his own grace and truth, in which Christ educates those who shall be instruments in advancing his kingdom. No native endowments, or acquired stores of knowledge, or shining talents, or degree of popular acceptance will dispense with this preparation. The preacher of Christ must be first a learner from Christ. He must have known the comfort and profit of soul-intercourse with Jesus, before he is fitted to make Jesus known to others. And not a day of sincere and humble walking with Christ, but will tell sooner or later upon the work. Even the mistakes, the falls, the rebukes of this preparatory time, will conduce to greater aptness and success in dealing with the souls of men. "When thou art converted," said the Lord to Peter, as he foretold the lamentable fall of the Apostle, "When thou art converted," restored again, recovered from thy fearful apostacy, "strengthen thy brethren." * The history

* Luke xxii. 32.

of the Apostle, in the book of the Acts, shows how he remembered this injunction.

Henceforth, therefore, we observe Peter in another character—not merely a learner, but a teacher—doing the work of an Evangelist, and embarking with his whole heart and soul in the noble enterprise of spreading abroad the saving knowledge of Christ, of turning sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. There is a marked contrast, not only in the position and circumstances of the man, but in the man himself; a contrast that will repeatedly force itself upon our attention, as we pursue the narrative. The disciples of Jesus, after witnessing his wondrous ascension from the Mount of Olives, return according to his command to Jerusalem, there to await in earnest expectation the fulfilment of a great and precious promise. During this interval, “they all continued in prayer and supplication.” It was a most solemn and interesting juncture. Christ had left them, so far as his visible presence was concerned. And although their faith was so confirmed and established by his glorious resurrection and ascension, yet must there have been somewhat of a sense of loneliness and helplessness on account of the departure of Him, upon whom they had been so accustomed to depend. Connected with regret at his removal, however, was anxious expectation of the promised

gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift which the Saviour had described in such sublime and emphatic language, assuring them that it would more than compensate for his own bodily presence, so that it was even expedient for them that he should go away. If there were continually in the church that spirit of prayer and supplication, of unanimity and fraternal love, of faith and expectation which prevailed in that little company, doubtless the Spirit of God would continue to descend in more constant and copious influences.

Before, however, the arrival of the expected blessing, we observe the Apostle Peter moving in a matter of great importance. Our Lord had chosen from out the body of his disciples, twelve to be his Apostles, his most favored servants and confidential friends. In appointing just this number he had reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, the Jewish Church being in so many respects typical of the Christian. The appointing of one for each tribe, Levi included, might intimate that henceforth the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron had lost their exclusive sacerdotal privileges. *The priesthood* was now for ever merged in Christ, the great high priest of our profession. The Christian ministry, the message of reconciliation, the pastoral oversight of Christ's flock, was now to be open to all whom the Lord would call, of every tribe and family. But when the little

company of Christ's faithful ones were gathered in the upper room, waiting for his promise, there were but *eleven* Apostles. A sad vacancy had occurred in the number. One of the chosen band had proved a traitor and a reprobate. The Apostle Peter proposes to his brethren present to fill this vacancy. In doing this, he refers briefly to the treachery and lamentable end of Judas. And he adduces certain prophetic passages from the Psalms, showing that this sad defection was not unnoticed by the Scriptures. The clear and unhesitating manner in which he applies these predictions shows that he was speaking from no private impulse, but by divine direction and guidance. With a clearness and power before unknown to him, he interprets the word of God, and counsels the infant Church in this emergency. Had Peter consulted his own feelings, we may well suppose that he would have shrunk from allusion to this awful subject. What but divine grace had made him to differ from his unhappy brother? Had not both fallen? And to mark them, at the moment when the denial with its impious execrations proceeded from Peter's mouth, would it not seem that both had fallen alike low and irrecoverably? Yet of these two sinning Apostles, the one hath repented and found mercy. The other hath died in his sin, and gone to his own place. In either case, the sin was followed

by bitter grief. But the grief of the one was that "godly sorrow, that worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of." The grief of the other was "the sorrow of the world that worketh death." In the one case, the great burden was the sense of ingratitude and unkindness to a merciful Saviour. In the other, the soul was tormented with agonizing remorse, unmixed with any emotions of love or trust. Judas was torn by such unquiet passions and frightful apprehensions, as goad and rend the apostate angels. The reward of iniquity is loathed, his accomplices hated—his own conduct overwhelms him with shame and agony. But he dares not go to the throne of grace. He has no heart to pray. His heart is still full of hatred and opposition to God, unhumbled and unchanged. The penitent Peter goes back to the company of his brethren, ready to hail with them his risen Master. The wretched but impenitent Judas puts an end, by his own hands, to his miserable life.

Oh, brethren, sin brings us all to one level, involves us all in one condemnation, exposes us all to one doom. True evangelical repentance, a heartfelt renunciation and confession of our wickedness, a godly sorrow, earnest supplication, looking in faith unto Jesus crucified, makes the great difference in our end, and saves us from the bitter pains of eternal death. Sin must be remembered and

mourned, for "at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Shall we mourn for sin like penitent Peter, or like wretched Judas? Shall we repent and find mercy from God, or shall we depart hence burdened by the mountain weight of unforgiven sin, lashed by keen remorse, pierced by the scorpion sting of once cherished iniquities, having no hope and without God? Deeply, we should think, must Peter have felt his indebtedness to the grace and mercy of God, while proposing the choice of another in Judas' room. But for that undeserved mercy the case had been his own, and the brethren had been consulting to fill his vacant office in the Church. And perhaps he was singled out to move in this matter, in order to impress more deeply on himself the wonder of his own preservation. And let every example of stubborn impenitence, and hopeless death affect in like manner the Christian's heart, with that undeserved love and grace which plucked his own feet out of the net and rescued him from the abyss of destruction.

Soon after the completion of the Apostolic college by the election of Matthias, the great long-promised outpouring of the Spirit was vouch-safed. As Jesus was crucified at one Jewish feast, the Passover; so was he glorified by the descent of the Holy Ghost at another. At Pentecost, so called because it was the 50th day after

the Passover, Israel had commemorated for 1,500 years the giving of the Law at Sinai, and had offered the first fruits of their land to Jehovah. Now the Gospel was to be sounded forth from Mount Zion, and the first fruits of that Gospel were to be plucked and consecrated a living sacrifice unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as Jesus rose on the first day of the week, thereby affixing to it a sacredness that eclipsed the former hallowed Sabbath, and made it emphatically "the Lord's day;" so the Holy Spirit would own the same blessed day as his chosen time of descent upon the Lord's gathered people. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

In considering this Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit, it is important for us to bear in mind the plain and wide distinction between the extraordinary, miraculous gifts of the third person of the blessed Trinity, and those less observable, but still more precious influences, which convert,

sanctify, and purify the soul. The Comforter, once bestowed upon the Church, was never to be finally withdrawn. He was to carry onward the work of Christ, accompanying and blessing the dispensation of the Gospel, turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, infusing holiness into the heirs of salvation, and training them for the heavenly inheritance, until the Lord Jesus shall be again revealed in power and great glory. But those miraculous powers, which were so important at the first promulgation of the Gospel, were to continue but for a limited period, and to be withdrawn as soon as their purpose was effected. After the Church of Christ was once established upon earth, the Spirit withdrew those supernatural gifts which invested with such lustre the first heralds of the cross. The knowledge from immediate inspiration of other languages, the power to heal the sick, and even to raise the dead, were no longer required for the extension of the truth, and therefore were no longer bestowed. The great effusion of these wondrous endowments was at Pentecost. It was betokened by the sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind; by the lambent flames, like cloven tongues, resting upon the Apostles' heads; and by their instant capacity of speaking in languages of which they were before utterly ignorant. It is evident that no such demonstrations are now accorded to the

Church. And therefore, in many points, Pentecost was not to be a pattern, to later ages, of spiritual gifts. Pretences to such marvels, at the present day, are the fruit of enthusiastic delusion, or of intentional fraud. We are only warranted now to expect the descending Spirit in silent, solemn impressions upon the soul ; opening the heart, as he did that of Lydia, to attend to the preached gospel ; convincing of sin, as he did the assembled thousands, who at Pentecost hearkened to the word of Christ ; enkindling a spirit of prayer and supplication ; making the heart feel its need of a Saviour, and inclining it to believe that Saviour's promise, and to trust in his mercy. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation ;—neither shall they say, Lo here ! or, lo there ! for the kingdom of God is within you." We are not to listen now for the sound of the rushing mighty wind, or to look for cloven tongues of fire, or to fancy that the Spirit hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm of passionate excitement. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."* Ye that really desire the blessed

* Isaiah lvii. 15.

and saving influences of the heavenly Comforter, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." "Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still." The tumult of the crowd, and sympathy with surrounding excitement cannot be a safe substitute for the lifting up of the soul to God in secret ; for the diligent study of his holy word ; the calling of sin to remembrance in the hour of retirement ; for contrite confession ; and earnest improvement of the divinely appointed means of grace. The Holy Spirit of God, beloved, is not far from every one of us. He is ever ready to bless the word of Christ, and to make it the power of God unto the salvation of them that believe. Sin not against the Holy Ghost by repelling him from your soul ; quenching his influence ; hardening yourself against his still small voice ; undervaluing those precious means of salvation which he hath abundantly bestowed, and which he hath promised to make effectual. But if you slight his gentle solicitations, and refuse to hearken to his pleadings, look for no miracle of grace, no whirlwind or earthquake, no rending of the heavens, no Pentecostal flames, to overcome your stubbornness, and translate you into the kingdom of grace.

As soon as the tidings of the wondrous event had spread through the city, and the inhabitants, as well as foreign Jews, from all parts of the Roman empire, whom the feast had drawn together at this time, had congregated in eager haste; the Apostles, under the mighty divine influence which rested upon them, applied themselves at once to their great work. The strangers from different and distant lands, heard, each in his own native tongue, the wonderful works of God. The astonishment produced by hearing these apparently rude Galileans, discoursing with such fluency and power in these divers languages, added vast weight to the subject upon which they spake. The hand of God was manifest. A deep awe settled upon the crowd, and with a fixed attention they gave audience to these strange tidings so wonderfully attested, so deeply interesting. Of the discourses delivered on that occasion, one, that of Peter, hath been preserved. On this account, the whole fruits of that day's labors are sometimes attributed to this one Apostle, and to this one sermon. For this idea, however, there is no foundation. All the Apostles were undoubtedly engaged in the same way, and the labors of all conduced to the result. One reason why the Apostle Peter is so prominent in the narrative, is, probably, attributable to the fact that he addressed the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in the Syriac,—

their own tongue ; while the others were making known to different audiences of the foreign Jews, in their peculiar languages, the same great truths.

No doubt, however, Peter was most conspicuous on this occasion, throwing himself with all the zeal and energy natural to him into the great work, and baptized abundantly with the Holy Ghost and with power. We cannot but regard with curiosity, the exposition of divine truth which he delivered, and the appeals which he uttered on so memorable and interesting an occasion. What manner of sermon must that have been which forced conviction on so many consciences, and brought so many hearers to cry for mercy ?

But, if we come to its examination with high raised expectations of being thrilled with sublime strains of eloquence, or startled by vehement impassioned appeals, or melted by deep pathos, or carried away by the torrent of fervid feeling, we shall be disappointed. The discourse contains none of the fire of oratory, or of the beauties of rhetoric. It is a plain, sober, faithful, pointed exposition of the truth, wholly devoid of pretension and art. Many a critical and fastidious audience of the present day would pronounce such a sermon tame and dull, and wonder that it should produce the slightest effect. But the excellency

of the power was evidently of God, and not of man. And if we ask, to what Peter's sermon owed its mighty effect, the answer must be, to the Holy Ghost.

1. The Apostle's discourse was *plain and simple*. It was level to the capacities of his humblest hearers. While it was entirely grave, dignified, and worthy of the greatness of the theme, free from all familiarity or degrading attempts to suit the popular taste, it was embodied in language that no attentive hearer could fail to comprehend.

2. It was eminently *a scriptural* sermon, full of quotations from the Old Testament. Not less than one-half of the discourse is thus quoted. The Apostle, speaking to his Jewish brethren, reasons with them out of the Scriptures. His object is to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the very Messiah foretold by their prophets, and that these are the times which their holy men had so long desired, and waited for.

3. It was a sermon *full of Christ*. The Apostle has no sooner replied to the absurd calumny to which himself and his brethren had been exposed, and vindicated the reality of this effusion of the Holy Spirit by a reference to the prophet Joel; than he at once introduces his Saviour; refers to their own knowledge of his life and miracles; describes his crucifixion as taking

place through God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge, while yet effected by wicked hands; and positively asserts his resurrection from the dead, and exaltation as Lord of all to the right hand of Jehovah. Peter is forgotten in the sermon. Nothing of himself there. But Christ is the great theme.

4. It was a *bold and faithful* sermon. Peter stood up amid the same crowd, who, a few weeks before, had hurried his Master to Calvary, with fierce and savage cries, "Away with him, crucify him;" and yet he does not hesitate to charge them with their flagrant guilt in decided, uncompromising terms. "Him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

5. It was an *earnest* sermon. The power of living reality breathed throughout. "With many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." All that heard him were impressed with the honesty and sincerity of the man. He was evidently himself persuaded of the truth of what he said. And the conviction of that truth darted from the speaker to the hearers. They began to realize the imminence of their danger. They,

too, became earnest to escape the deserved condemnation. "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" What a recompense of these first Apostolic labors, to hear this inquiry from the depth of anxious hearts? What music to their ears, what joy to their hearts, unto whom hath been committed the dispensation of the Gospel, when applied to by their awakened hearers for instruction in the way of salvation? The reward which the true minister of Christ desires, is not the voice of flattering commendation, but the earnest question, "What must I do to be saved?" "How shall I secure for my own soul an interest in Jesus' cross, and Jesus' kingdom? How shall I obtain forgiveness of sin, and the aid of God's Holy Spirit? How shall I escape the dreadful consequences of unpardoned guilt, and secure a share in the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting Gospel?" When this all-important question is seriously and earnestly put, we recognize the working of the blessed Spirit, we thank God, and take courage. But, let all, to whom the inquirer for salvation applies, take heed that they answer the question as Peter answered it. "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy

Ghost." We cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more. We cannot sunder what he has joined together. We also must insist on true repentance, a change of mind, a new heart, godly sorrow, an unfeigned confession of sin, and trusting faith in Jesus Christ. And no less must we insist upon the open confession of Christ before men, sincere participation in his appointed sacraments, and upon visible union with his Church. Serious and awful is their responsibility who give different counsel to inquiring souls, from that given in the day of Pentecost by inspired Apostles, whose heads were yet radiant with the mystic flames, and who spake as the Spirit gave them utterance.

We have said, brethren, that the Holy Ghost is still present to bless the word of reconciliation. When the truth, as it is in Jesus, is presented to you as it was in Peter's sermon, simply and intelligibly, scripturally, faithfully and earnestly, then are the same agencies brought to bear on you, which led such multitudes at Pentecost to the Saviour's feet. Have you ever been pricked to the heart by the sense of your own sin, your ingratitude to Jesus crucified, your soul's worth, preciousness and danger? Have you ever gone to the ministers of the Lord below, and to the Lord himself on his mercy-seat above, with the question that burst from so many lips, on that memo-

ble day? It is not to be supposed that God will more for you than this, and if still unmoved and impenitent, what must be the issue? "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

THE MIRACLE AND SERMON IN THE TEMPLE.

ACTS III. 1.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour."

After the offering up of the true Paschal Lamb upon the cross, the temple worship and Jewish ritual had fulfilled their object. The shadows of good things must now pass away, the substance being come. The Almighty now no longer regarded the temple on Mount Moriah as his house. The victims might bleed, the incense might burn, the priests might go through the prescribed offices, but the Lord was not in his holy temple. Soon would that venerable and costly pile, deserted already by its divine guardian, be razed to the foundation, and not one stone left upon another.

But there intervened a space of about forty years between the pronouncing and execution of the sentence, upon city and temple. And many disciples of Christ, Jews by birthright, and strongly attached, like their countrymen, to the worship and usages of their fathers, continued during this

period, devoutly to observe the duties of their national religion. While they had their own assemblies for prayer and praise, and preaching of the riches of Christ; they also took part in the solemnities of the temple service. They loved the gates of Zion. Their new discovery of the Messiah by no means made them indifferent to the appointed holy rites and times. They united in their observance with increased interest, as well as augmented knowledge. Amid the crowd of their formal and bigoted countrymen, they worshipped God in spirit and in truth. While the multitude looked not beyond the outward and visible, they discovered the hidden meaning and beauty of these types and emblems. The bleeding sacrifice presented to their faith the Lamb of God; and the incense-burning priest, exhibited their great High Priest and Intercessor above. The gospel's radiance illumined the darkness and obscurity of the ancient ritual, and Christ was apparent in every holy form and act. It is the same spirit of faith, the same looking unto Jesus, brethren, that must give life, interest, and enjoyment to the simpler worship of the Christian sanctuary. When we really seek the favor and blessing of our God and Father, when his word and promise are sweet to our taste, when we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen, when we hunger for the bread

of life, and thirst for the living water, then will a day in the Lord's courts be better to us than a thousand. Where there is no interest and no pleasure in the solemn worship of God's temple, there is great reason to fear that the spirit of grace and supplication is wanting. Immediately after the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Ghost, we read of Apostles going up to the temple at the hour of prayer.

Peter and John went up *together* to the temple. We find them often together. And hence we may infer that they were bosom friends. Their united attendance upon Jesus had bound them to each other in a holy and disinterested affection. And yet there would seem in their dispositions a marked contrast—the one gentle and mild, the other decided, energetic and ardent. Yet these peculiarities, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, made them, perhaps, the more to delight in each others society. The true basis of enduring and profitable friendship, is a common interest in our Lord Jesus Christ. They who truly love the Saviour, love that Saviour's image reflected by his genuine disciples. If we are Christ's, Christ will be dear to us in his people. Such friendship will be proof against those jealousies, suspicions, and evil surmisings, that so oft and so fatally interrupt mere earthly attachments. Unsanctified love easily cools into indifference, or changes into aver-

sion. But Christian friendship expects to survive the tomb, and to rekindle its hallowed torch at the celestial altar. And, therefore, it beareth all things, and believeth all things, during the passage through the wilderness to that better country. Full of comfort and strength it is to those who pursue together the ways of pleasantness. "Peace be within thy walls," Zion of God, "and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good."

As Peter and John took sweet counsel together and went up to the house of God as friends, they encounter a strong appeal to their sympathies. At the threshhold of that gorgeous and magnificent portal, added by Herod to the temple, and known as the Beautiful Gate, there lies a helpless cripple, lame from his birth, dependent for his daily bread on the alms of the charitable, who passed him on their way to worship. Well understanding the connection between devotion, and acts of sympathy and kindness to the poor and suffering, a connection so often recognized in the Scriptures, he chooses this as the fittest time and place for soliciting the aid which his infirmities made necessary. When he addresses his customary pleadings to the Apostles, he is bidden by Peter to look on them. There hath sprung up in the Apostle's breast the con-

viction, that this is a fit occasion of exercising those miraculous powers wherewith their Lord had promised to endue them. The impotent man looks up to them with earnest gaze, expecting the usual benefaction. "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up, and walk." Silver and gold may greatly assist and benefit our suffering fellow-creatures, and our alms should be proportionate to our means, if we expect God's blessing on our own substance or industry. But there are benefactions more precious than silver and gold. They who have not wealth to dispense, may sometimes bestow what is far better. If we can impart to a fellow-sinner on his way to judgment and eternity, the knowledge of Jesus Christ ; if we can direct the weary and heavy laden to him who giveth rest ; if we can point the anxious and desponding to the Lamb of God ; if we can remove the perplexities of the doubting, calm the fears of the distressed, soothe the sorrows of the afflicted, and minister to the mind diseased, we are conferring a far richer and more lasting benefit than any temporal aid that can be imparted. The poorest Christian may have thus the power of communicating the most blessed of all gifts, for God makes his people his own instruments both in relieving bodily want, and in

instructing, guiding, comforting, and saving the immortal soul.

The working of this miracle was a signal indication of Peter's faith. To have failed in such an attempt, in so public a place, would have exposed him and his cause to derision, and overwhelmed him with confusion. This was their first essay, since their Lord's departure, to perform those wonders which they had been wont to witness in him. But the Apostle's faith was strong in that name of power which he was warranted to use. He speaks with unhesitating confidence. He ventures his whole reputation upon the instant performance of an astonishing miracle. Unless this cripple from his birth, apparently doomed to decrepitude all his days, rise at once in full strength and vigor from the ground, Peter stands before his countrymen a detected impostor. Infamy and scorn will be his portion, and the cause to which he hath devoted his life is ruined. In order to estimate the degree of faith required in the performance of the miracles recorded in Scripture, we must put ourselves in the place of those by whom they were wrought. We must consider what would have been the consequence of failure. We must remember the publicity attendant on these acts. They were not done in a corner. The subjects of them were not strangers, or unknown persons. They were individuals with whom mul-

titudes were acquainted, and the cures were performed in the midst of interested and vigilant bystanders. There was every disposition to scrutinize the matter, to probe it to the utmost, to examine the circumstances, and to detect artifice and collusion if they existed. The subject of the present narrative was well known to the worshippers in the temple. They were accustomed to see him lie at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and often had bestowed upon him their alms. His incurable lameness was notorious. In this public place, while at the appointed hour of evening prayer, numbers were passing into the temple, Peter spake to the beggar in a tone of authority. He mentions a name, which the priests and rulers of that consecrated house had sought to brand with infamy, and consign to perpetual disgrace; a name which had probably, since the Saviour's apprehension and crucifixion, been only repeated there in hatred and contempt. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." A mighty power accompanied that rejected name. The withered and useless limbs of the impotent man confessed its potency. An unexpected strength nerves the feet that never had walked, and the restored crip-

ple now exults in the possession of his new faculties, and hastens to use them by accompanying his deliverers into the house of God.

The gift of miracles, as well as of tongues, hath been withdrawn from the Church, being no longer required after the Gospel has been widely promulgated and the Church firmly established, and therefore no such visible wonders are now wrought, or expected to be wrought by the name of Jesus. Yet has not that name lost its power. It is in the same great name that we preach repentance and salvation ; and all who are walking in the light of God's countenance, justified freely by his grace, and ripening for his kingdom, know its divine might. It is a power accompanying that name which opens the blind eyes, melts the stubborn heart, converts the sinner from the error of his ways, and saves the soul from death. It is a name effectual to comfort the sorrowful, and to bind up the broken-hearted. It can fill the bereaved mourner with sweet acquiescence, and light up the dying eye with hope. When that name is breathed in earnest prayer and supplication, it pierces the very skies, it opens the windows of heaven, and blessings are poured down, more than we can ask or think. God hears it with complacency and delight, and the petitions that would else be presumptuous and hopeless, are thus made acceptable and well pleasing in his sight. "Ask," saith

the Redeemer, “what ye will, *in my name*, and it shall be given you.” And let us learn from the Apostle’s bold venture on the occasion of this cure, a lesson of implicit confidence ; and when we pray, let us ask in faith, nothing wavering. Believing prayer will be answered, and if not answered in the precise way, and at the very time that we expect, will be so in a still better way and at a still fitter time.

The miracle wrought at an hour and place so public, excited, as might be supposed, great attention and curiosity. “All the people saw him walking and praising God : and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them, into the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.” The Apostles perceive at once that this is a favorable moment for entering on their great work, as Christ’s ambassadors. The curious and wondering crowd are in a state to hearken respectfully to the performers of so wonderful an act, and to give audience to their own explanation of it. Peter, therefore, proceeds immediately to improve this propitious time, and to speak a word in season. The place and the circumstances were such as to heighten the interest

of his discourse. In this very porch of Solomon, had the Saviour, whom he was now about to proclaim as the Christ of God, often stood, and reasoned with the Scribes, and spoken as never man spake. In this house, consecrated to the worship of Israel's God, was now for the first time the gospel of a risen Jesus, to be published. And the ears of many were now opened to drink in with fixed attention, its saving truths.

While this, the Apostle's second sermon, resembled greatly that which he delivered on the day of Pentecost, there were also points of difference. The burden of his message was the same, for he preached Jesus and the resurrection. This is a theme of which the Christian minister must never tire, and of which the Christian hearer should never grow weary. No love of novelty, or desire to interest and attract the curious, must lead us away from the great and glorious subject. We proclaim to dying sinners a Saviour's grace. "We preach Christ crucified." And while the proper exhibition and illustration of our great theme admits of aid and light from the different branches of knowledge, and should be presented with scriptural fulness, under various aspects, and with multiform arguments and motives, yet we must never lose sight of the cardinal object, the lifting up of Jesus. Our business is not to amuse the curious, nor entertain the lovers of novelty

and excitement, but to repeat, with unwearied zeal, the story of redeeming love, and make known with all plainness, those great and precious truths, which to believe, and receive, and obey, is salvation. We deal with men on subjects too solemn and important to excuse trifling or vanity. “ Unto some we are a savor of life unto life, and unto some a savor of death unto death: and who is sufficient for these things ?” If we do you good, it will be by God’s blessing on the truth as it is in Jesus. And, therefore, like the Apostles of Christ, we must be ever going back to the cross and the tomb, and setting forth Him, who is “ The way, the truth, and the life.” The Apostle begins with an earnest disclaimer of any homage as due to himself, on account of this miracle. “ Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ; or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had this man to walk ?” With a holy jealousy for his Master’s honor, he cannot for a moment suffer the reputation of this work to be ascribed to himself and his fellow Apostle. He hastens to undeceive those who were disposed to look upon them with reverence and awe, as the real workers of the marvel, and directs their praises altogether to his Lord. If any good is done in Jesus’ name, it becomes us to be alike jealous of his peculiar glory, and to beware how the mortal instrument is put in the place of the Lord

of all power and might. It is a dreadful intrusion on the prerogatives of Christ, when the servant seeks his own glory, rather than his who sent him. The Apostle then refers his hearers to the exalted giver of all grace. He presents to them Jesus, as the Son of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of their fathers; and he presses home upon their consciences the charge of guilt, with a boldness and energy exceeding that even manifested in his Pentecostal sermon. "Ye denied the Holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life." Here is revealed to their startled minds, the amazing guilt of that hour of madness when they cried before the tribunal of Pilate, "Not this man, but Barabbas." Now they are made to see the dreadful blasphemy of that impious choice. To their own Messiah, the Son of the living God, they had preferred the basest and vilest of men. They had rejected the Prince of life, and desired as a boon that a destroyer of life, a murderer, should be granted unto them. Yet, while the Apostle discovers to them the nature of the choice made in their unhallowed frenzy, he holds out to them the hope of forgiveness. He kindly anticipates the plea that some might venture to urge, that it was in ignorance of the divine character and claims of Jesus they had acted. This ignorance, indeed, was itself a sin. They

might have known that Jesus was the Messiah. There was evidence enough to satisfy every honest mind, to convince every sincere enquirer into the truth. But the Apostle was far from wishing to drive them to despair. While he urged upon them their grievous wickedness, in direct, uncompromising terms, he opened the door wide for their return. He addressed sinners ; and he must make them feel their guilt ; but his message was one of grace and love. The burden of our preaching, brethren, is of God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. It is of mercy, not of wrath. True, we must warn the wicked of his guilt and danger. We must charge upon the conscience many and flagrant violations of the law of God. Especially must we urge the gravest of all God's controversies, the unholy contempt, of his dear Son. We must show the folly and the wickedness of preferring such vain and worthless objects, as engross many hearts to the exclusion of a crucified Saviour. But we would convince the soul of its misery and ruin, that it may value that Saviour's grace. "Knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men :" persuade them to enter the refuge, to embrace the hope set before them. The trumpet note of approaching judgment is intended to render precious in the eyes of dying men, the grace of him who saveth to the uttermost. The Apostle, therefore, goes on thus to

address his trembling and downcast hearers, just awakened to a sense of the inexcusable vileness of their past conduct. "Repent ye, thererore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." He reminds them that they are "the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with the fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." And he solemnly assures them that "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, had sent him first unto them, to bless them, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities." Thus was the risen Jesus lifted up as a Saviour, the very Saviour foretold by all the prophets, a Saviour from sin as well as wrath. Repentance and conversion, a real turning from sin to holiness, a cordial acceptance of their Messiah, were proposed to them as the conditions of mercy. Thus, turning to him whom they had rejected, their sins, grievous and hateful as they were, would be blotted out, and abounding mercy would erase them from the book of God's remembrance.

While the Apostle, in this discourse, exhorted them to repentance, that they might, individually, obtain forgiveness and salvation, he also urges upon them collectively, the same duties, in order to secure the blessing of the Almighty as a people. In this temple, whither the heart of every Jew turned with such reverence and devotion, and

with this multitude of his countrymen around him, he seemed to be addressing Israel as a nation. His heart beat high with hope, that the whole people would now look with faith and reverence upon him whom they had pierced, and by bowing before him as one man, bring on that blessed era of Messiah's triumph, of which the prophets had spoken in such glowing terms. "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come," or rather, *in order* that times of refreshing may come "from the presence of the Lord ; and he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you : whom the heaven must receive, until the times of restitution of all things, which God had spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets, since the world began." When the Saviour was about to ascend from Olivet, the Apostles asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?" His answer was, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." But although they were not to know the times and the seasons, they seem to have expected certainly that the kingdom would be restored to Israel. The Apostle Peter here urges his countrymen with one heart to embrace the gospel, in order to hasten on that period of future light and holiness. He seems to anticipate times of spiri-

tual refreshment to attend the ingathering of God's ancient people into his fold. This great event he evidently connects with another manifestation of Christ, and with that "restitution of all things," to which the finger of prophecy had been pointing for so many ages.

That blessed consummation, however, for which the Apostle's heart so yearned, was far more distant than he supposed. The times and the seasons, as his Saviour expressly affirmed, the Father had kept in his own power. Peter and his brethren had not been informed of them. The glorious visions of prophecy, even yet are not realized. Age after age hath passed, and century hath followed century, and still the arm of the Lord is not made bare. The veil is on the heart of Israel, and the times of restitution of all things are delayed; for a thousand years are with the Lord as one day, and one day as a thousand years. Still the promise is Yea and Amen. "The word of the Lord abideth for ever." The times of refreshing shall arrive from the presence of the Lord, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. "Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." But while the bridegroom tarrieth, "Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." We are not authorized to unfold the secret counsels of God, we

“know not when the time is ;” but the great era of a Saviour’s triumph, nearer or more remote, varies not our duty. “Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out,” is the voice that speaks to you. Until you repent and turn to God, your sin remaineth. You are alike unprepared for the hour of death, or for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. No times of refreshing and consolation will come to your soul, until you bow as a penitent before the cross of Jesus. Oh, how great is that mercy which extends the offer of pardon to the guilty and condemned; which annexes it to conditions so simple and reasonable as repentance and conversion ; which imposes no harsh severities ; mocks us with no unattainable bliss ; but brings salvation nigh, even to our very doors, and proclaims, “Turn, and ye shall live.” Aye, even though like those to whom the Apostle spake, we have denied the Holy One and the just, though we have been guilty of preferring the world and its vanities, the flesh and its unholy passions, the tempter and his wiles, to Jesus Christ and his salvation, still the gracious assurance is addressed to us, “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

THE ARRAIGNMENT BEFORE THE SANHEDRIM.

ACTS IV. 13.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

When our Saviour sent forth his twelve Apostles for the first time to do the work of evangelists, it was with a plain and distinct warning of great opposition and persecution to be encountered. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." The history of Christianity from the beginning is the best comment on these words. The event showed how true a prophet was the founder of this religion, and how perfectly open to his far-seeing eye was the whole progress of his Gospel. He concealed not from his disciples the trials and sacrifices, which their profession

would cost them. He gave them to understand, that to serve and follow him would expose them to the most deadly hatred and bitter persecution. The apparently frail and helpless bark of his Church was to be launched forth into the midst of a stormy and agitated sea. It was to be buffeted by mighty tempests, and exposed to the whole fury of warring elements. Yet it held on its way. It rode securely over the surface of the boiling deep. It yielded not to the blast of the hurricane. And outliving the rude shocks to which it was exposed, it has been favored with smoother seas and gentler breezes, and shall at length gain the fair havens of eternal peace. But the advance of a faith so pure and unearthly in the face of such relentless hostility, and amid such tribulations and tempests, is evidence conclusive that it is not of man but of God. As in our last discourse upon the life of the Apostle Peter, we had before us the first miracle performed in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, after his ascension, so we now come to the consideration of the first persecution which encountered the revived gospel. We are to notice the opening act of that course of violence and opposition, which went on deepening and growing, until the blood of the saints flowed like water on every side, and no form of insult and torture, no ingenuity of cruelty and outrage that hell could invent was left untried. How little do we realize,

brethren, the privilege that we enjoy in being permitted to worship God, according to the dictates of our own conscience and the teachings of his word, with none to molest or make us afraid?

The notoriety of the miraculous cure of the impotent man in the temple, and the attention excited both by the work itself, and by the preaching of the Apostles, soon attracted the jealous notice of the men in authority. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was eventide."

Among those most active in this oppressive act are mentioned the Sadducees, the infidels of the day, men who denied any resurrection, or future state of rewards and punishments. Now it may at first seem strange, that men of this stamp should trouble themselves to interfere at all with this new religion. If they, in their superior wisdom, knew it to be a mere delusion, and were perfectly assured that the resurrection which was proclaimed was but a phantom, why should they not leave those who thought differently to the free enjoyment of their own opinions? Yet this is but a specimen of that persecuting spirit which infidelity, where it has had the power, has been wont

to exhibit. Unbelief is tolerant of every thing but true religion. But towards the truth it ever cherishes a bitter hostility, which when opportunity is given is always ready to break forth. These Sadducees were grieved that the Apostles should preach through Jesus the resurrection of the dead. It is an unpleasant and painful thing to the sceptic to hear of those solemn eternal realities, that he has contemptuously rejected. In truth, the confidence of many of these men is far more in appearance than in reality. While they declaim loudly against the scriptures, and the doctrines of the resurrection and the judgment, their hearts are often disquieted with fears and anxieties. They are desirous of making proselytes to their own opinions, in order to drive away their apprehensions and confirm themselves in unbelief. And the progress and power of true Christianity are a grief and torment to them, because fitted to revive these fears, and disturb their desired security.

The day following the seizure of Peter and John witnessed their arraignment before the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation. To an humble Israelite, there could be no earthly assembly so imposing and august as this. There sat the anointed High Priest in his robes of office, the religious head of the nation. There were gathered the nearest of kin and most eminent of the priestly family, there the honored teachers of the

Law, the men most had in reverence for station, learning, and sanctity. Before so venerable a body, an ordinary Jew would be abashed and overcome. And it was doubtless the expectation of those in authority that such would be the awe produced upon Peter and John, that they would readily make any submission and consent to any conditions that might be exacted of them.

Before this assembly the Apostles are now conducted. "And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, by what power or by what name have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel: If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." "Can it be," we are ready to exclaim, as we hear this firm unshrinking testimony for Jesus of Nazareth, made to the very face of the men who a short time before gave him up to an

ignominious death, "can it be that this is the same Peter, who then denied that very Jesus? Is this undaunted confessor the man who then trembled at the look and voice of a maid-servant, who shrank so terrified from the suspicion of discipleship, whose disclaimers of any knowledge of the prisoner at the bar were so vehement and repeated, who in order to escape detection added oaths and curses to his base falsehood?" Now he stands before the very rulers whose displeasure he then so greatly feared—he stands arraigned as the principal offender and not merely as an accessory. He confronts the very men whose hands are red with his Master's blood, and whose implacable enmity against his name and doctrine he perfectly understood. And yet how calm and fearless his bearing now! Not a shadow of apprehension on his countenance, not a glance of timidity or alarm. His limbs tremble not. His tongue falters not. With becoming modesty of deportment, but without a moment's hesitation, he declares truths that must pierce his judges to the quick. Alike removed from insolent defiance and from unmanly terror, he speaks with a calmness, a boldness, a directness and pungency that his hearers little expected. The man, whom the rulers of Israel thought so easily to browbeat and silence, by the mere show of authority and the utterance of threats, stands before them with unmoved com-

posure, and deliberately charges them with a most atrocious crime, even the murder of their long expected Messiah. They who had met together in order to convict and punish the teachers of a new and erroneous doctrine, find themselves charged with the blackest guilt. The tables seem to be turned, and the position of the parties strangely and unexpectedly reversed. Who are the trembling culprits, the convicted criminals now? These two plain men of undaunted mien and fluent utterance, so firm, so calm, so determined? Or these men of official consequence, anointed priests, grave counsellors and admired Rabbins? Can the robes of office conceal the tremor that agitates the frame, or the look of assumed indifference and pride dispel the anxiety and alarm that betray themselves in the countenance. They who had summoned despised Galileans to answer for an offence, are now themselves bidden to answer for an offence infinitely more grave and heinous. The professed builders are charged with having rejected the very corner stone laid by God in Zion, and are further warned that, spite of their rejection, it had become indeed the head of the corner.

To the Sanhedrim the firmness, composure and manly defence of the men before them appeared wholly unaccountable. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived

that they were unlearned and ignorant men," that is men of humble origin and private station, untaught in the schools of the Rabbins, and uninitiated into the dogmas of Pharisaism, "they marvelled." The intrepidity and composure of the faithful confessors of Christ, their ready defence of their faith in words few, simple, earnest, forcible, and penetrating, have in every age extorted similar surprise and admiration from their persecutors. On no principles of their own can the haughty oppressors account for the evident superiority and elevation of those arraigned before them, for their indifference to danger and death, for their forgetfulness of self, for their prompt answers to ensnaring questions, and their powerful maintenance, in the most trying circumstances, of the opinions imputed to them as a crime. But the Christian is at no loss to account for such deportment. He remembers that promise wherewith the Saviour accompanied his announcement of the future perils of his faithful servants: "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour, what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." Often and signally has this promise been verified.

Many a humble and obscure disciple of Jesus, dragged for his hope's sake to the bar of unjust judgment, has there maintained his Saviour's cause in a manner that plainly showed a more than human strength and wisdom. Placed in extremest jeopardy, called suddenly to choose between their faith and their life; the timid have become bold, the shrinking have been confident, the untaught in human schools and unaccustomed to open their mouth in public, have vindicated their faith with an eloquence and a force that could not be gainsayed. Before the blood-stained tribunal of heathen power, amid the raging populace clamorous for his destruction, in the conclave of persecutors, miscalling themselves Christian, and in the dread sepulchral vaults of the dark and fearful inquisition, the faithful witness for the truth as it is in Jesus has displayed the meekness, the composure, the intrepidity, the unanswerable wisdom that the Lord promised. No triumphs of Christianity evince more brightly its heavenly origin, and the divine might that accompanies it, than these fiery trials and fierce onslights of the powers of darkness. Well may ye marvel, ye men of assumed sanctity but real depravity, who now sit in Moses' seat, well may ye marvel at the boldness, the firmness, the cogent arguments, the unanswerable appeals of Peter and John. Ye are listening not to Galilean fishermen, but to the

Spirit of the living God. It is none other than the Holy Ghost who reasons with you so powerfully, and thus refutes your cavils and despises your threatenings. He it is who hath inspired with dauntless courage these timid hearts, and who causes these tongues, that would else be palsied with terror, to discourse so convincingly and eloquently. Never can that witness for Jesus, which so grieves and disquiets you, be silenced by the weight of your authority, by your fierce threatenings, or your cruel persecutions. It shall swell and heighten, it shall grow louder and louder, until the world is compelled to hearken, and the gates of hell tremble.

The Apostle Peter, took this occasion to bring to the ears of the Jewish rulers, a truth the most important and solemn which man can hear; one which not only concerned them most deeply and intimately, but which ought to come home to every heart and conscience. After assuring them that the crucified Jesus was indeed the cornerstone, he adds, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

When we hear at such a time and before such an audience, so impressive an announcement of gospel truth from the accused disciples, we see at once how consistent with the goodness and glory

of God, the permission of such trials as they now encountered. Thus were the great and saving doctrines of Christianity brought to the ears of men that would never else have heard them. "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings," the Lord had said, "for my sake, for a testimony against them." A testimony that they had been informed of the way of salvation, and been assured of the power and willingness of Jesus Christ to save all that come unto him. It is the will of God that the gospel be preached to every creature, and in various and oft unlooked for methods he brings it to bear upon men. While persecutors have been carrying out their own plans of violence and oppression, they have at the same time effected the designs of the Almighty. They who never would have gone to the assemblies of the Christians to hear the message of God, are addressed upon the same solemn and weighty themes, by the criminals arraigned at their tribunals. Peter and John stand before the Jewish Sanhedrim, not merely as accused persons, but as evangelists. And how know we but that this strong affirmation of the gospel proved the power of God, unto salvation, unto some of those who heard it. Not a few memorable instances are related in history of the triumph of Christian patience and divine truth over the unjust magistrate and the hardened persecutor. The execu-

tioner himself, who hath dragged the martyr to the stake or scaffold, hath been so moved and melted by the fortitude, the meekness, the affectionate remonstrances, the soul-inspiring hopes of the sufferer, that he hath declared himself on the very spot, a convert to the proscribed faith, and submitted joyfully to the same doom which he had just before been ready to inflict. Not long after this defence of the two Apostles before the council, we read that "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." We may not unreasonably infer that some of them might have been sitting in that very Sanhedrim, before which Peter uttered this noble affirmation of the all-sufficiency of Jesus to save, and this solemn denial of any possible salvation besides. But whether they heard or forbore, believed or scoffed, it was "a testimony against them." Never could they henceforth plead ignorance, as an excuse for unbelief and impenitence. If they still persisted in their sins, it would not be because the tidings of a Saviour's grace had failed to reach them. That hour when Peter testified that the name of Jesus was the only name given under heaven amongst men, whereby they must be saved, would be written with a pen of iron in the book of God's remembrance, and at once stamped with a far heavier accountability their future lives.

The fact, brethren, that we have heard the gos-

pel of Christ plainly and faithfully presented, is one of the most momentous in the history of our souls. If the knowledge of Jesus does not save us, it will fearfully aggravate our condemnation. To perish, after having had the door of the refuge opened wide before us, after having been lovingly invited and plainly warned, will be of all perdition the most dreadful. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"

There was every disposition, among the majority of the Sanhedrim, to proceed to the severest measures against the disseminators of this new doctrine. But it was difficult to invent any plausible pretext for oppressing and persecuting men who could be convicted of no real offence, and who had just performed a miracle so notorious and so beneficial. "And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." What just ground of exception could they take against men who had exerted so wonderful a power, for so benevolent an object? The restored cripple was a silent but most powerful witness to the truth, and the happy effects of the doctrine of Christ. What an encouragement is it, brethren, when the ministers of Christ, or the defenders of his religion against the attacks and cavils of its enemies, can refer to the

Lord's living epistles, to those whose lives and conversation exhibit the power and excellency of his holy religion! The effect of the Gospel in turning the wicked from his way; in elevating the frivolous and worldly above their former enjoyments; in rendering the proud, humble; the passionate and irritable, meek; the sensual and debased, pure and holy; the selfish and covetous, kind and disinterested; the ungodly, devout and spiritually minded; is one of its strongest appeals to them that hate and revile it. Let men take knowledge of you, beloved, that ye have been with Jesus, and "with well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, that they who are of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."

In the lack of any just ground of procedure against the Apostles, the Sanhedrim conclude, in their private conference, to resort to menaces and strict injunctions to them to cease at once their public instructions. "But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus." How little did they know the men with whom they had to deal? How little knew they the spirit of that Gospel which they thus hoped to suppress? "But Peter and John

answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." And when these intrepid witnesses of Jesus, being dismissed with stern threatenings, returned to their own company ; and the little band, thus menaced and endangered, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, what was the tenor of their prayer ? Did they supplicate for their own safety, and for deliverance from enemies so formidable, and perils so imminent ? Did they beseech their God that the heavy storm cloud which now blackened their horizon, and was driving on towards them with fearful rapidity, might be held back or dispelled ? No, this is no part of their petitions. They lose sight of their personal risk and jeopardy. All their concern is for the glory of their Lord. "They lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is : who, by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were ga-

thered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." All which the persecuted disciples ask for themselves, is the gift of undaunted boldness in testifying the Gospel, and the accompanying power of God in the performance of miracles. To this sublime supplication there is indicated an immediate and favorable answer. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." And here was the source of a strength and constancy that could resist the utmost rage of persecution. Such men might be accused and imprisoned, they might be robbed and scourged, branded and anathematized; they might be beheaded, crucified and burnt, but they could not be silenced while the tongue was able to move. It has been an inexplicable secret to persecutors, that they could not eradicate the Gospel of Jesus. Torn up or trampled down in one part of the field, it is sure to spring up in another. It survives the fiercest havoc of the enemy, and rises, like the fabled Phœnix, with new vigor, from the ashes of

martyrdom. Jew and Gentile have alike labored to exterminate the truth as it is in Jesus. Heathen Rome and Papal Rome in turn waged for centuries a bloody warfare against the saints of the Most High; but alike without success. Christ's martyrs have kissed the instrument of torture, and hugged the stake to which they were bound. Let that Gospel, brethren, which has been so oft and so nobly vindicated by the constancy and the deaths of its converts, be dear to our hearts. It hath come down to us embalmed with the fragrant memories, and watered with the blood of the confessors and martyrs of Jesus, through many ages. Let us cling to it with unwavering devotion, and never falter in its profession or its obedience. And since there is no other name than that of Jesus given under heaven amongst men, whereby we must be saved, see to it, beloved, that ye put your whole trust in that blessed name. To neglect, to disown, to reject it is to perish. Let that name be written on your foreheads, and graven in your hearts. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: If we deny him, he also will deny us."

THE APPALLING JUDGMENT.

ACTS V. 5.

“And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.”

The miracles recorded in holy writ are, for the most part, miracles of mercy. Those wondrous powers, which the Almighty entrusted to his servants as the incontrovertible credentials of their mission, were exerted commonly for the relief of human misery. The benevolent character of a divine religion is strikingly apparent, in the nature of these supernatural vouchers of its truth. The object manifestly is not to startle and affright men into submission, but to win them to faith and obedience by the mercifulness of these marvellous works. Awe indeed, and reverence must be produced by such exhibition of unearthly power, but awe tempered with gratitude and love. Thus it was that our Lord Jesus Christ, in the performance of his astonishing miracles, “went about doing good;” and his disciples, in like manner, gave undeniable proof, in the signs and wonders which they showed, of the beneficence of the Gospel which they were sent to proclaim.

But to this usually gracious tenor of these marvellous attestations of Christianity there were exceptions; not frequent indeed, but of a peculiarly awful and impressive character. Sometimes under the new, as under the old dispensation, the God whose wonted revelations were so compassionate and merciful, showed himself as "a consuming fire." His justly provoked wrath, on these rare occasions, flamed forth like the sudden flash from the thunder-cloud, and careless, irreverent mortals were startled from their dreams of false security, and trembled before "that fearful and glorious name, the Lord Jehovah." Such a visitation it was which thrilled with deepest awe the infant Church at Jerusalem, and spread fear and alarm through multitudes of the city's inhabitants—the death of Ananias and Sapphira. This solemn event, occurring in the midst of the general attention and interest awakened by the rising of Christianity, in such life and vigor, from its author's sepulchre, produced, as might be supposed, impressions of deepest seriousness and reverence, and the strongest conviction of the truth, holiness and divine origin of the new religion. As the agent, whom God selected to pronounce in his name sentence upon the offenders, was the Apostle whose life we are now considering, the event calls for our attentive study.

The condition of the Church at Jerusalem

after the dismissal of Peter and John by the Sanhedrim, their reluctant dismissal of those whom they could find no fair pretext for oppressing and punishing, is described to us in glowing language. The pen which never flatters hath traced a picture of the unanimity, fraternal kindness, charity and fervent devotion of these first disciples of the Lord Jesus, which must extort the admiration of every unprejudiced reader. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

The circumstances of these first disciples of Christ were altogether peculiar and extraordinary. A multitude of the new converts were foreign Jews, and proselytes from distant countries, who had been attracted to Jerusalem by the great feasts of the Passover and Pentecost. These of course prolonged their stay in the city much beyond their original intention, unwilling to leave the teaching

and guidance of the Apostles, and the company of their brethren. But those of them whose resources were not large, would soon exhaust their means, and require aid from the charity of their brethren. The bigotry of the unbelieving Jews doubtless expelled many of the new disciples from their former places of abode, and the converted poor of Jerusalem, as well as the strangers, were cut off from those assistances which had been heretofore extended to them. Thus there sprung up a speedy and large demand upon the sympathies of those Christians, who were favored with the possession of property. Numbers of their homeless and indigent brethren appealed to their charity for support. Neither did they appeal in vain. The charity of the Church rose with the demand upon it. The more affluent disciples, enraptured with the discovery of those heavenly treasures which were now unfolded to them, counted their earthly possessions as dross, or only valued them so far as they might by the use of them glorify God, and benefit their brethren. Hence there prevailed a spirit of liberality that has never since been equalled. In the strength of their faith; and the fervor of their love, they counted it a most precious privilege to minister to their Lord in his impoverished and needy members. And not a few there were, who in their zealous liberality, contributed every thing that

they had to the common fund, and were content to subsist themselves on the same allowance that was made to the necessitous.

That this self-impoverishment was wholly voluntary, and not exacted, appears from the very narrative of Ananias and Sapphira that we are now to consider. That the Gospel does not require a community of goods is evident from numerous passages of the epistles which define the respective duties of the rich and the poor; and it would be easy to show that such community, as a general and permanent arrangement, would be anything but a blessing. But in the new and extraordinary circumstances of the infant Church at Jerusalem, this conduct was the natural prompting of that brotherly-kindness which glowed so fervently in the Christian body, and of that faith which held so cheap earth, and all that was earthly. The disinterested and affectionate spirit of the new religion, the harmony, consideration, sympathy and self-forgetfulness which pertain to its genuine spirit and working, were thus brightly and beautifully exhibited.

There was felt not unnaturally among the members of the early Church, an affectionate admiration of this abounding and unselfish liberality. Those who practised it received a gratitude and consideration therefor, which they were far from expecting or desiring. They had not done their

works to be seen or observed of men, but men saw them, and glorified their heavenly Father; and not only so, but testified their grateful, approving sense of this noble conduct. Now it is the consequence of our fallen state that, with whatever is good, elevated and holy upon earth, there should mingle the evil and the base. The wheat no sooner springs up with fair promise in the field, than there appear tares also. Out of the very virtues and excellencies of God's servants, grow abuses and counterfeits. From the very fact that Christian benevolence and charity are so lovely and commendable, the temptation arises to obtain, by spurious imitation, that approbation and applause which are due to the reality. The false pretender to goodness follows hard upon the faithful and blameless, and the hypocrite covets the reputation and influence of the upright. In a double way was the peculiar state of things in the early Church liable to abuse:—first, from hypocritical converts, attaching themselves to the Church from mercenary motives, that they might be supported by its charity: and secondly, from pretenders to that honor and esteem which naturally attached to men of property, who cast their all into the common fund. From such abuses the cause of Christ had more to fear, at this crisis, than from the open hostility of the Jewish rulers. Should these false pretenders succeed, the Church

would be soon thronged with a multitude of mercenary and insincere members, who would prove to it a burden and a disgrace, hang as a dead weight upon its progress, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Such men would be held up by its enemies as the fair representatives of the new doctrine, and Christianity would utterly fail of making that general, deep impression of its purity, disinterestedness and unearthly excellence, upon which so greatly depended its growth, influence and success.

Hence, we can well perceive how needful at its outset that vindication of its purity, effected by the fearful judgment that befel Ananias and Sapphira. Men must learn that this new and divine religion is not to be trifled with. It was no safe cloak for the hypocrite—no convenient engine to be perverted by the ambitious and covetous. As in the first establishment of the Jewish economy, God vindicated his right to implicit obedience by the flames which consumed Nadab and Abihu, when they offered strange fire before him: as at the entrance of Israel into Canaan, the sin of Achán in hiding the accursed thing was so promptly and terribly punished; so now, at the introduction of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the world which he had redeemed, God saw fit in like manner to strike a blow that might deter the unprincipled hypocrite from intruding among his

flock, and teach all men the danger of abusing his holy religion to their unhallowed ends and projects.

The individual, whose name stands npon the inspired page as the object of so awful a visitation, was Ananias. His purpose was to obtain in the Church that reputation and esteem which attached to men like Barnabas, the Levite of Cyprus, who had contributed their whole estate to the exigencies of the body. He, therefore, also sold his possession, and voluntarily brought a part of the purchase money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet. Wherein consisted the offence? He might, as Peter told him, have kept the whole to himself. He was not compelled to sell his possession, or, having sold it, to offer the price to the Apostles. But his sin was in professing to do the very same thing which others had done. He brought a part of the price, as if it had been the whole. Either by word or gesture he indicated that he gave up his whole property to the Lord, as unreservedly and heartily as Barnabas, and others of the same spirit. He expected to stand in the same desirable position with those unworldly and liberal men. He anticipated praise from the Apostles, and honor from his brethren, for this act of generosity. He would have a claim to support from the funds of the Christian body. And he had moreover in reserve the residue of his estate, in case of the

failure of the Gospel, or the exhaustion of its treasury. Thus there was in this act a hypocritical profession of sanctity and liberality, falsehood and covetousness, and a fraud attempted upon the inspired Apostles. How terribly must have sounded in his ear the Apostle's stern interrogation? "But Peter said, Ananias, Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

Fearful indeed was this exposure of the wicked deception of this unhappy man. The Apostle charges him with acting under the influence of the great Adversary, the father of lies: and yet not so as to diminish his own accountability and guilt.. For immediately after attributing this iniquity to Satan's having filled his heart, he adds, "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?" The enemy of our souls has much to do with our sins; and some sins particularly, among which falsehood is prominent, are ascribed to his seductions; but this Satanic influence does not away with, neither diminishes our own accountability. If we admit, cherish, yield to the temptation, which by God's help we might successfully resist, we must answer for it as truly our own.

The sin, which the Apostle here charges upon this wretched man, is a "lie unto the Holy Ghost." He repeats the charge as a "lie unto God," thus implying the great scriptural doctrine of the divinity and personality of the Holy Ghost. We must perceive the justice of this charge, when we remember what made the Apostles to differ from other men. Why were they placed in this prominent position? How were they enabled to work these miracles, and to speak with other tongues? Who had entrusted them with the government and oversight of the Church of God, and appointed them true expounders of the Gospel, and unerring guides to the seekers of salvation? The answer must be, that all these gifts and powers were conferred on them by the Holy Ghost. This distinguished them so remarkably from others, and qualified them for the office which they filled. An attempt to impose upon them therefore, acting in their Apostolic character, was an attempt to deceive the Spirit of God. It was not simply to man that Ananias uttered this falsehood. It was to the Holy Ghost, who had set apart these men for himself, to act as his delegates, to dispense his gifts, to speak as his mouth. Ananias knew that the Apostles were not acting on their own behalf—that it was not as ordinary men that they administered the affairs of the Church. He knew of the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. He

might have seen the cloven flames resting upon the heads of the men, whom he was attempting to deceive. He had daily opportunity of witnessing their miraculous powers. And he could not doubt that the Holy Ghost abode in them, as chosen vessels, and exhibited through them his divine energy. To the Spirit of God therefore the bold falsehood was uttered.

As Peter charges this flagrant guilt upon Ananias, the disciples gathered around, are struck with amazement and horror. But how are these feelings deepened, as their eyes turn from the Apostle to the detected hypocrite! A sudden, awful change comes over the trembling culprit. A livid paleness overspreads his countenance. His eyes grow dim and glassy. A momentary expression of indescribable horror convulses his features, and then they are fixed in immovable rigidity. The affrighted by-standers see death stamped on the ghastly countenance. And ere they can catch the sinking frame, it falls heavily upon the ground. The living man of an instant before, is now a corpse. The tongue, that had just uttered a lie unto the Holy Ghost, is motionless. The spirit of the wretched Ananias hath fled from earth. Whither, we dare not follow it.

The change which the stroke of death makes in the mortal, the sudden transformation of the breathing, animated, sensitive man into a clod of

earth, retaining but the pallid semblance of humanity, is most affecting under all circumstances. But oh, how appalling is it when the sinner is cut off in his sin ! When no divine consolations have soothed the parting agony, when no cheering hope illumines the death-chamber, when the witnesses feel no privilege to chant the sweet anthem, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord!" With sad and heavy hearts, the young men, whose duty it was, remove the frightful object, the body scathed as it were with heaven's avenging flash. Unutterable emotions of awe and dread fill every soul. The awful presence of a God of purer eyes than to behold evil, of One that cannot look on iniquity, is felt by all.

But the work of judgment is not yet complete. There was an accomplice in this impious deception, and they who were one in sin must be one in doom. Oh ! how sad a thing is it, when those bonds of affection and confidence which are meant so greatly to promote our happiness, and strengthen us for duty and holiness, are perverted to the encouragement of sin. How sad is it, when they who should bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, who should provoke one another to love and good works, who should admonish and incite each other to walk in the way of life, how sad when they consult and combine to do wickedness ? How blighting, deadly a curse

is sin, which can pervert God's precious gifts to our own perdition, poison every pure enjoyment and healthful influence, and make those domestic ties that should be hallowed and blessed, only the occasions of confederacy in guilt! When husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister pursue, hand in hand, the broad road that leadeth to destruction, and urge each other down the slippery steep of hell, angels must weep and shudder.

Unconscious of the fearful judgment that hath befallen her husband, Sapphira enters, prepared to confirm the preconcerted lie. Wretched woman, canst thou not read in the horror visible on every countenance, that some awful event hath taken place? Why this ominous silence, this ill-suppressed agitation, these starting tears, these anxious, fearful looks, bent upon thyself? What means this sternly penetrating, but sorrowful glance of the Apostle Peter? Calm and motionless he stands in the midst;—the hypocritical oblation still lying at his feet. His is the look and the manner of one nerving himself for an inevitable, but soul-distressing task. But there is also manifest a more than common elevation and solemnity in his demeanor. He is under a mighty influence of the Spirit, and lifted above the weakness of mortality. The man is forgotten in the messenger of God. No particle of human pas-

sion, no emotion of anger or hatred stirs in his breast. God himself is dealing with these offenders, and Peter is but his instrument.

The solemn question of the Apostle gives Sapphira yet an opportunity of repentance. The last accent of grace breathed in the words, "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" Oh, stop, thou wretched deceiver. Seal not thy doom forever by the presumptuous lie. But her conscience is seared, and her heart hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. And the fatal untruth flows readily from her lips, "And she said, yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." She listens to the awful words,—her own death sentence. She begins to apprehend their dread meaning. Conviction of her guilt and of her danger just flashes upon her soul; and in a moment that soul is required by God, and hurried away to its great account. "Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost. And the young men came in, and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things."

Well might a solemn awe settle upon all to

whom these startling tidings came. Surely must they have exclaimed, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The effect of this appalling judgment was to repel every hollow-hearted dissembler from the Christian fold. "Of the rest durst no man join himself unto them"—no man who was not conscious of the purity of his motives, and the singleness of his heart. The insincere and worldly perceived how dangerous the attempt to make gain of godliness, or to deal falsely with the Lord's inspired servants. But the terrible stroke had not the effect of making the Gospel less precious, or the Church less attractive to them that were in earnest for salvation. For we read immediately after, "The people magnified them: and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes, both of men and women." This making bare of the Almighty arm was a proof not to be gainsayed of the truth and divine origin of the gospel, and self-accusing penitents felt that their sole hope, their only safety, was under the shadow of a Saviour's cross.

From this painfully interesting narrative, let us gather, beloved, a deeper conviction of the evil and danger of sin, and especially of the sins of hypocrisy, deception, fraud and falsehood. Have we not cause to mourn and to tremble when we are compelled to witness the frequency of such

sins? For how slight a cause will many sacrifice the truth? What an amount of falsehood and deception are constantly ventured on? How important that the young especially be taught to abhor and dread all equivocation and deceit; to feel its hatefulness to God, and its deadly peril to the soul? The sin of falsehood is no less offensive to God, because he does not strike the liar dead in a moment. He has warned us, that "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." And surely this awful sentence ought to be as effectual to deter us from this sin, as the immediate infliction of such a doom as befel this guilty pair.

Let us be especially truthful and sincere in all that pertains to our religious duties. When we profess to give God all, let us not wilfully and willingly keep back any part of what is justly his. It was optional with Ananias to make his offering to the Lord. But the self-consecration that we are bound to render is not optional, for we are not our own, but bought with a price. God has already the highest claims upon us. Let us not deal deceitfully with him. When the disciple of Jesus studies to unite the services of God and Mammon, gives to the world those affections which have been vowed to the Saviour, evinces zeal and ardor in the pursuit of selfish objects, but is slug-

gish and indifferent to the promotion of the Redeemer's glory, is there no keeping back of part of the price? When the hand is open to the demands of pride and pleasure, but shut against the claims of the Gospel, and the sufferings of the poor; when the expenditure is lavish for personal enjoyment or ambition, and parsimonious for the Redeemer's cause, is there no keeping back of part of the price? When parents professedly dedicate their offspring to God, in holy baptism, and then suffer them to grow up in unchecked folly, untaught in the nature of the solemn promise and vow made in their name, permitted to follow the multitude to do evil, without restraint or remonstrance, is there no keeping back part of the price? Oh, brethren, we deal with a heart-searching God, who requireth truth in the inward parts. Let integrity and uprightness preserve us. God is merciful to the defects and short-comings of the earnest and true-hearted. Our Great High Priest is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but he will not away with dissimulation and double-dealing. If we serve God at all, it must be in sincerity and truth.

And is not every secret sinner attempting to lie unto God? And where sinners unite to cover their iniquity, are they not, like Ananias and Sapphira, agreeing together to tempt the Spirit of the

Lord? Is it not in effect, venturing an experiment upon the existence and the omniscience of the Mighty One; trying whether God can perceive, and whether he will punish? "Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are! And thou sayest, How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud?" And all those triflers with divine long-suffering, who say to the Spirit of God again and again, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee"—are they not attempting to put off the Holy visitant with false and insincere promises, and hollow protestations? When will man learn the incredible folly, the exceeding danger of dealing deceitfully with their Maker? "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

SIMON THE MAGICIAN.

ACTS VIII. 20, 21.

"But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

The growth of the Christian Church in Jerusalem, spite of all the opposition that it experienced, provoked still more the jealousy of the Jewish rulers, and kindled the flames of a fiercer persecution. The spirit of rancorous hostility to the truth of God first began to slake its rage with blood in the martyrdom of holy Stephen; and after the sacrifice of this willing victim, broke forth with violence against the whole body of believers. Led on by the furious bigotry of Saul of Tarsus, the enemies of the faith redoubled their exertions to crush and exterminate it, and the storm which burst so violently upon Jerusalem drove out multitudes of the new disciples into the surrounding cities and villages. "At that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles." But this assault

of the enemy, so far from suppressing the new religion, had only the effect of spreading it most rapidly and successfully. There needed such a strong blast of persecution to scatter abroad the seed of the kingdom. The Gospel was not intended to be pent up within the walls of Jerusalem, but to be communicated to a world of sinners. And the rage of its embittered foes was only the means of sooner effecting this merciful purpose of God. The murder of Stephen and the furious onslaught that followed, were but the signal of an immediate and rapid evangelization. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word." Their own preference would doubtless have been to abide longer at Jerusalem, listening to the edifying teachings of the Apostles, and enjoying delightful communion with their brethren. But the Lord had need of them. He had a work for them to do as his witnesses and missionaries, and in their flight they carried with them the knowledge of Christ. Their faith was too strong and their zeal too fervent to permit them to be silent fugitives. Wherever they went, their master went with them. Such of them as had been set apart to the ministry, publicly, and with the authority of God's ambassadors, proclaimed salvation through a crucified Redeemer; and the private Christians taught from house to house, and communicated to all whom

they met by the way the glad tidings. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and true Christian love longs to impart to others its own happiness and hopes, and grows richer and stronger by imparting. Thus the Gospel was extended with unexpected rapidity, and the tempest blast that scattered abroad the members of the Church at Jerusalem, carried healing in its wings to many that were ready to perish. With what strong confidence may they who love the gates of Zion and whose hearts tremble for the ark of God, rely upon the wisdom and power of Him who is the keeper and husband of his Church! What may seem to our foreboding hearts the storm-cloud of calamity and ruin, shall pour down blessings. The events that God's people greatly dread, prove the means of all others most effectual for the advance of his kingdom. His enemies may rage and blaspheme, but the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. "The waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier. The Lord sitteth above the water flood. The Lord abideth a king for ever." Happy they whose cause is his: of whom he saith, "It is my people; and they can answer, "The Lord is my God."

Among those driven from Jerusalem at this juncture was Philip, one of the newly ordained Deacons of the Church, a colleague of holy Ste-

phen. From his diligent and successful labors in disseminating the Gospel, he is also called Philip the Evangelist. He, it is recorded, "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." The city which he visited is supposed, with some probability, to have been the same in which our Saviour once halted on his way to Jerusalem, where he conversed with the woman at the well, and was received by many as the Messiah. If this were so, it explains the speedy acceptance of the Gospel which Philip now made known to them in its finished glory. "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

The Gospel, heartily received and truly followed, will bring great joy to the city, to the family, to the soul where it gains entrance. The discovery of its hidden treasures fills the believing heart with a delight and gratitude that can flow from no other source. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." If the supposed knowledge of Christ make us not really and vastly happier, it must be that we either do not embrace, or do not understand the Gospel. A simple faith, cling-

ing to the promises and appropriating the salvation of Jesus to its own need ; a trust of God's pardoning mercy ; a hope that looks forward within the veil and anticipates the everlasting kingdom, will warm, expand, enliven, delight the soul. "I am as glad of thy word," exclaims the Psalmist, "as one that findeth great spoils." There was great joy in this Samaritan city, for Christianity was hailed there as a boon from heaven. The truth was received in the love of it. The purifying influences of the Gospel were realized. Unclean spirits fled at the name of Jesus, sin quailed and Satan trembled before the banner of the Redeemer. It was another place from what it had been before. Vice shrunk into covert retreats ; anger and strife yielded to peace and good will ; instead of the voice of blasphemy or ribaldry was heard the hymn of praise and the song of thanksgiving. A happy, holy, delightful change hath come over the city. And the simple means of effecting this moral revolution was the preaching of Christ, confirmed by those miraculous works which his first heralds were permitted to show. The miracles we have not now, brethren. The Gospel of Jesus we have. It is no less effectual now, than in the Apostles' days, to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Miracles served but to attest the divine origin of the new religion. The moral trans-

formations were wrought by the Spirit, through the word. But the word must be received with reverence and faith to make it the power of God unto salvation. All the real and permanent good that is wrought under the name of religion, is by the simple preaching and teaching of Christ. No human contrivances, no artificial stimulants, no expedient or machinery of man's invention, can add to the efficacy, or enlarge the real triumphs of the Gospel, truly and faithfully proclaimed. The temporary success of equivocal methods of working on the passions of men will be ultimately followed by disappointment and disaster. To have recourse to them, as if the Gospel had lost its saving power, argues unbelief, and disparagement of the appointed means of spiritual healing. When we preach Christ to men, publicly and from house to house, plainly, faithfully, earnestly, affectionately, we have set open the door of the kingdom. Thenceforth the responsibility of the whole coming eternity is upon them. If they welcome the Saviour, there will be great joy in their homes and in their hearts—there will be joy even in heaven over their repentance. If they refuse him, we can do no more; but it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the judgment than for the despisers of His grace. It is under such unspeakably solemn conditions, beloved, that we

testify the Gospel of the grace of God. Shall any of you hear it only to condemnation?

"Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." The same Almighty Ruler who had suffered the members of the Church at Jerusalem to be scattered abroad, the more rapidly to communicate the treasures of the gospel, had kept the Apostles still at Jerusalem. So long as their presence there was essential to the perfecting of their work, and laying deep and firm the foundations of the Church, their enemies had no power to harm them. When put in prison, the angel of the Lord, by night, had opened the prison doors, and sent them forth to resume their labors. And although they were not now, probably, at liberty to proclaim so openly the word of life, yet they were still carrying forward, with unabated diligence, the work for which they were commissioned; settling the Church at Jerusalem, and watching over its interests in the surrounding regions. On hearing the good news of the success of Philip at Samaria, they commission two

of their number to visit the city. There had been a time when, as Jews, they were not disposed to hold any friendly intercourse with Samaritans. But that deep-rooted prejudice, that had estranged so long these neighboring people, yielded to the benignant power of true religion. Christianity broke down the middle wall of partition between them, led them to feel an affectionate interest in each others' welfare, and disposed them cheerfully to extend such aid as was in their power. How little do those professed Christians who allow themselves to indulge bitter prejudices and rancorous feelings against their fellow-men, because of differences of nation, or dwelling, or opinion, or race, apprehend the benevolent and expansive character of the Saviour's religion! "He, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man," and the fact of his great love for every member of the human family, ought to produce in our hearts a feeling of kindness and fraternal affection to all for whom Christ died.

The Apostles, Peter and John, were united in this mission. And we cannot but observe here again, how continually the inspired narrative disproves the idea of Peter being invested with any primacy or superiority over the other Apostles. Had he been the admitted Head and Governor of the whole Church, he would have deputed some of the number to visit the Church at Samaria. But

instead of sending, he is himself sent; and we have the declaration of our Saviour himself to the effect, that "He that is sent is not greater than he that sent him." The object of this Apostolic visit was to settle generally the affairs of the newly-planted Church, and to add their labors to those of Philip, for its increase and edification, and especially to render such offices as Philip was not authorized to perform. One of these was a solemn imposition of hands upon the baptized converts, with prayer for the influences of the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. On this occasion it was, in the Apostolic Church, that the first disciples received those extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which were then their privilege and seal. The Apostles, upon whose heads the Spirit had rested in cloven flames at Pentecost, were the sole dispensers of the same wonderful gifts which had then been bestowed upon themselves. And this is the meaning of the words, that "As yet the Holy Ghost had fallen upon none" of the Samaritans. He had not fallen upon them in these extraordinary gifts and powers. He had been granted to them in his still more precious and saving influences as their enlightener, converter and sanctifier. Through his descending grace their hearts had been opened to welcome the Saviour, and that joy which had pervaded evangelized Samaria, was a "joy in the Holy Ghost."

Those more striking and obvious manifestations of his power, had not yet been imparted. But upon the imposition of the Apostle's hands, the converts received this token also of his presence, and performed works surpassing man's unaided strength.

I may here remark, in passing, that to this Apostolic practice, the Church from the primitive age to the present, has traced the edifying rite of confirming baptized disciples, with the laying on of hands of the chief pastors of the flock. And while the miraculous gifts of the Spirit no longer accompany the usage, yet have we good reason to hope and believe that such as present themselves with true and penitent hearts will receive, in answer to the prayers offered upon so solemn an occasion, the blessed influences of the Spirit, to strengthen their faith and establish them in holiness. Neither if the Church felt herself at liberty to disregard scriptural and primitive example, could she invent a mode of professing faith and obedience to Christ more simple, appropriate and edifying.

On this visit, the Apostles had also a painful duty to perform. As the spirit of falsehood and deceit had manifested itself, at Jerusalem, in Ananias and Sapphira, so the spirit of worldly ambition and of abuse of sacred things to unholy ends appeared at Samaria, in Simon Magus. From the

inspired history we learn that this man was a pretended sorcerer or magician, who had largely imposed upon the inhabitants of this city, "giving out that himself was some great One," something more than mortal, and gaining the assent of many to his false and arrogant claims. Such practisers upon the credulity and folly of mankind have never been wanting, and have seldom failed of success. Even in our own age of boasted enlightenment and diffused knowledge, such deceptions are still current. The false prophet, the religious impostor, the pretended astrologer and soothsayer, reap a plenteous harvest of gain from the folly, credulity and wickedness of men. Among the ignorant and vicious there is a strange proclivity to delusion. They that are deaf to the calls of God's word, are the willing dupes of artifice and pretension. Many turn away from the truth to give ear unto fables, and the lying wonders of Satan take captive hearts that are impenetrable to the Gospel of Christ. One of these successful deceivers was Simon. But the entrance of the Gospel into Samaria had the effect of delivering men from his pernicious influence. "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women." The bright beams of true religion dispelled the darkness that had enveloped their souls. Between

the pure Gospel, and every form of falsehood and superstition, there is an irreconcileable hostility. They cannot co-exist.

But what was most remarkable, Simon professed himself a convert to the new religion. "Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." Simon "*believed*," it is said; but not "*with the heart, unto righteousness*." His was the conviction of the understanding that Christianity was true and divine; such belief as belongs to those evil spirits who "*believe and tremble*"; such belief as many have who have been educated in Christian lands, who profess not to doubt that the Gospel is from God, and who yet are, personally, as unaffected and uninfluenced by its solemn truths as the veriest infidel. An intelligent, candid mind, cannot gainsay the evidence of our holy religion. But this is quite a different thing from surrendering the soul to Christ, and reposing with humble confidence on his power to save. True faith alway works by love, purifies the heart and overcomes the world. And this is the faith, without which "*it is impossible to please God*."

But far different from this was Simon's conviction. He was amazed at the miracles by which the preachers of this new religion established

their mission. He found his own lying wonders, which had formerly gained him such reputation, entirely outdone by these open and well-authenticated miracles. He attached himself, either out of policy or fear to Philip, as one whose desire it was to serve and follow Christ ; and the Evangelist, not seeming to doubt his sincerity, admitted him by baptism, into the Church. While it is the duty of the Christian minister to make known with all plainness the way of salvation, to set forth what God requires, to explain the nature of true and acceptable religion, and to warn men against abusing the ordinances of Christ ; it ought, at the same time, to be understood that the responsibility of a religious profession is personal. The pastor instructs, counsels, invites and warns. The candidate for Church membership decides for himself, whether, with a good conscience, he can join himself to the Lord in his own appointed way. This was the case even in that age, when there was such a gift in the Church as "the discerning of spirits." Much more must it be so now.

Simon's admiration was still farther enhanced when he beheld the Apostles, Peter and John, obtaining for the Samaritan converts, by the laying on of hands and prayer, the very miraculous gifts which Philip had exhibited. His own desire is kindled to obtain the same wondrous ability. He,

too, would be an Apostle. Not content with membership in the Church, he covets the highest office and the largest powers. He perceives how much reputation and profit he might obtain from such an endowment. For it would enable him to surpass all his previous juggleries and wonders, and open his way to the attainment of the highest station, honors and wealth. The avidity showed by this mercenary man for the acquirement of this power, is a striking evidence of the real disinterestedness and humility of the Apostles. Possessed of that endowment, which Simon coveted as the key to wealth and preferment, they continued poor and humble. Their miraculous gifts, and the power of conferring them upon others, were never perverted to their own convenience, aggrandizement and gain; but applied as a sacred trust, with all fidelity, to the one great object of promoting their Redeemer's kingdom and glory.

It is common for the worldly and covetous to measure others by themselves, and to suppose that the bribe that would prove to them irresistible, must be equally alluring to every heart. We find Simon acting on this principle, offering the Apostles money, and saying, "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost."

But how was he thunderstruck when the holy indignation of the Apostle Peter bursts forth in

the startling and withering rebuke, “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money? Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness; and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”

The strong expression of the Apostle, “Thy money perish with thee,” we are not to regard as an imprecation, or as a wish on his part that Simon might be a castaway; but rather as an emphatic warning to the deluded man of the danger in which he stood. He was in imminent jeopardy of perishing, together with his corruptible treasure. So far from being permitted to indulge a hope of the Apostleship, he must know that he is destitute of any share whatever in the grace of the Saviour. Although he had received Christian baptism, he was utterly devoid of Christian holiness and hope. He had, in truth, no part or lot in the rich blessings of the Gospel, but remained in the bitterness and malignity of his unconverted, sinful nature, a very bond slave of iniquity. And so atrocious was the thought of his heart, that although the Apostle exhorted him to re-

pent, he dares not speak confidently of his forgiveness.

From early Church history, it would appear that Simon never did truly repent, but returning to his old trade of sorcery, and becoming an open enemy of the Gospel, died as he had lived in the bond of iniquity. At any rate, he has given a perpetual name to a most flagitious practice ; the buying and selling of holy offices and ecclesiastical trusts being known even to the present day as Simony. He stands on the Gospel page, like the unhappy Ananias, a warning to them that would make gain of godliness.

To how many of those who suffer themselves to be blinded by the god of this world, to the neglect of a higher and better portion ; to how many, who, in their eager pursuit of riches, violate the law of God or lose sight of the kingdom of heaven, might the warning be addressed, which broke so overwhelmingly upon Simon, the magician, "Thy money perish with thee !" Whatever the success of the plans of the worldling, however large a heap he may manage to gather, unless arrested in his course by timely repentance, his soul and his money will perish together. A miserable equivalent is that for which the covetous man parts with the heritage of a blessed immortality. Let ours be all that avarice could crave,

and what will it avail us, if at last owner and treasure perish together?

Neither let us forget, beloved, that we have no part or lot in the matter of salvation, except our hearts be right with God. What an address was that of Peter to a professed believer in Christ? "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Simon might call himself a servant of God, but the Spirit denounced him as a servant of Mammon. He was still, spite of his baptism, in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity—in a state deplorably wretched and hopeless—offensive to God, and tending to destruction. To make us acceptable to our heavenly Father, divine grace must create us anew in righteousness; must cleanse and sanctify our hearts; work in us a godly sorrow for and hatred of sin, shed abroad within us the love of God, inspire us with a desire for holiness; make us willingly obedient, humble and believing. Except the Spirit of God thus change the heart and purify the affections, we remain unforgiven, whatever our privileges, whatever our name. Baptismal water cannot cleanse the impenitent soul, or make alive the dead in trespasses and sins. Let those who suppose it to be efficacious, without regard to the faith and repentance of the candidate, explain to us how it was that Simon was still, after his bap-

tism, in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. When the heart has been touched by the grace of God, is truly contrite for its sins past, earnestly desires to be saved with a holy salvation, to be rescued from the dominion as well as the punishment of sin, embraces confidingly the promises, and casts itself at Jesus' feet, crying "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" then are Christian ordinances a rich blessing, a seal of acceptance and pardon, a pledge of immortality. Then the voice of the Spirit answers, "Why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." But where there is no "answer of a good conscience towards God;" the putting away of the filth of the flesh, the outward oblation is profitless. The man continues just what he was, unregenerate and unblessed.

But in what a miserable state is that man, beloved, whether baptized or unbaptized, whether a false professor or an acknowledged worldling, unto whom it may be truly testified by Christ's ministers, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Thou hast no part in the present privileges of the Gospel, its pardon, reconciliation, adoption, grace. Thou hast no part in the present consolations of the Gospel, its peace, joy, hope, delight in God, patience under affliction,

comfort in life, support in death. Thou hast no part in the everlasting rewards of the Gospel; the approving smile of the world's great Judge, the resurrection unto life, the thrilling welcome, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom," the crown of righteousness that fadeth not away, the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, the ever-increasing joys and brightening glories of the kingdom of God. How earnestly do we exhort such an one, "Repent, therefore, of all thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thoughts of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Nay, we use not peradventures. It is our privilege to promise and assure full and free forgiveness to all those who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe the holy Gospel. Wherefore, let us beseech God to grant us all true repentance and his Holy Spirit, that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, and that we may come at the last to his eternal joy. Amen.

THE RESURRECTION OF TABITHA.

ACTS IX. 40.

"But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up."

Our last notice of the Apostle Peter left him at the city of Samaria, where he confirmed the souls of the faithful disciples of Christ, and rebuked the profane ambition of the hypocritical Simon. After accomplishing the object of their mission to this city, the two Apostles return to Jerusalem. But their journey homeward was not unmarked by labors in their Master's cause. In the towns and villages through which they passed, they left a blessing behind them. Their Saviour went with them, and the savor of his name, spread abroad by their lips, was as the fragrance of precious ointment poured forth. Every journey was a missionary tour, and every resting-place heard the glad tidings of salvation. And many, who, at first, looked with contempt upon these humble and travel-worn Galileans, had reason ere they parted to exclaim, "How beautiful

are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

In the interval of some three or four years between the return of Peter from this mission, and his next recorded absence from Jerusalem, took place what must have been a memorable and interesting interview, the meeting between himself and the Apostle Paul. At the time when Peter and John went down on their errand of love to Samaria, Saul was hunting the faithful members of Christ's flock with the ferocity of a beast of prey. "As for Saul he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." And soon after the two Apostles had started from Jerusalem to visit the Samaritans, he also had gone forth, with equal zeal, but with how different a spirit. They went as missionaries of Jesus, he as a persecutor; rage in his soul, and threatenings and slaughter on his lip. While they were intent on scattering the good seed of the kingdom, publishing peace on earth and good will to men, emulating the angels of light in their heaven-taught charity: he pushes onward with remorseless speed and unpitying heart, like the very angel of death, a plague and terror to the servants of the Redeemer. How opposite their spirit! How far as the poles apart their respective dispositions, purposes and objects! Are they not destined to be

irreconcileably opposed to each other through life? Is there a power that can ever combine these opposite and uncongenial spirits in harmony and brotherly love? That can unite them in the same communion, the same pursuit, the same heaven? This would be indeed for the lion to lie down with the lamb. The Apostles had doubtless most exalted ideas of their Redeemer's power and grace, but could they have ventured to anticipate such a triumph? They probably often prayed for deliverance from this embittered persecutor, but was their faith strong enough to pray for his conversion? When he started forth to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, the Christians of Jerusalem trembled for their exposed and endangered brethren, and were earnest in their intercessions to God for them; but could it have entered into their hearts that Saul would enter Damascus, not as a proud persecutor, but as an humble believer? That he would be known there not as the sanguinary Jewish bigot, the implacable, unrelenting enemy of Jesus Christ, but as the firm and zealous preacher of that very Jesus, the foremost champion of the faith which he had with infuriate violence aimed to destroy. Such a change would have seemed indeed too much to hope for. And when the converted Saul returns again to Jerusalem, the disciples to whom his name had been such a terror,

were at first slow to believe it. "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken unto him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." From Saint Paul's own statement in the Epistle to the Galatians it would appear that he met at that time only two of the Apostles, the others being probably absent on such labors as had previously taken Peter and John to Samaria. "Then after three years," he tells us, (three years after his conversion,) "I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother." The Apostle James had remained at Jerusalem, as Bishop of that which was truly the mother Church. And it was the Lord's ordering that his servants Peter and Paul should now have an opportunity of full and fraternal conference, and consult together on the means of promoting their Redeemer's kingdom. Remarkable and interesting, I have said, must have been this interview, whether they had ever met before, we are not informed. If so, it must have been under cir-

cumstances how different. Saul might have been one of the conclave before which Peter had made his bold defence of the Gospel, and by which he had been so vehemently threatened. Or as a deeply interested spectator, he might have stood by, marking with boiling impatience and ill-suppressed rage the undaunted composure of the accused Christians. Whether they had personally met however or not, they had been well known to each other by reputation; the one, as a leading advocate of the faith of Jesus, the other, as one of its chiefest and most formidable enemies. But now they meet as Christians; one in heart and mind, devoted to the same great object, ready to sacrifice life itself on the shrine of their common faith. The name of Jesus was alike precious to both, the Gospel of Jesus alike dear. Oh, the mighty power of grace divine to mould and melt into one, hearts once so estranged, characters seemingly so opposite and irreconcileable! "With God nothing is impossible." The Apostle Peter had witnessed wondrous miracles wrought by his Almighty Saviour. He was himself enabled to work others no less amazing, in that Saviour's name. But did ever miracle appear to him so vast and astonishing as the change of Saul the Pharisee into Saul the Christian. Was he as much awed, and affected, and moved to gratitude and adoration, by beholding his Redeemer walking on

the storm-lashed sea, and commanding to the rushing blast and the foaming billow, "Peace, be still!" as by this evidence of his triumph over furious passion, malignant hostility and implacable rage? After all that he had witnessed, all that he had experienced of a Saviour's power, must he not still have been ready to exclaim, when exchanging affectionate greetings with his brother Apostle, "What hath God wrought?" The starting tear in the eye that had once glared so furiously upon the persecuted saint; the cordial grasp of the hand that had hurled the missile of death at holy Stephen; the fervent prayer and benediction from lips that had clamored for the blood of Christ's faithful ones; these must have thrilled the soul of Peter with emotions that words were inadequate to express. One class of Gospel miracles still remain, brethren, to encourage our faith; its moral transformations, its triumphs over the stubbornness, selfishness, wickedness and evil passions of men. And is there not enough in the Christian's heart to confirm his confidence in the energy of the Gospel and the power of Christ? to teach him not to despair of his obdurate and impenitent brother? But to pray trustingly, and labor hopefully for the bringing nigh unto God of "them that are far off?"

Very cheering and refreshing must this short interview have proved to both of these great Apost-

tles. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man the countenance of his friend." In the sweet counsel which they were permitted to take together, in the outpourings of their holy thoughts, and in the free interchange of their feelings ; in their communings concerning their divine Master and his Gospel ; in their consultations respecting the advancement of his kingdom upon earth, and their anticipations of his kingdom of glory, how rapidly and delightfully must these days of their sojourn under one roof have flown by ! Very vivid would be their conceptions, at such moments, of the happiness unalloyed and joy unspeakable, of the future meetings of the saints, in their Father's house, no more to part !

But this world is the scene of labor and trial, not of continuing felicity and tranquil repose, and after fifteen days, the Apostles separate : the departure of St. Paul from Jerusalem being accelerated by the hostility excited among the Hellenist or Grecian Jews, by his bold testimony for Jesus. We next read of St. Peter as on a Missionary or Apostolic tour, through the Churches in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. After the departure of Saul from Jerusalem, the Christian Church was favored with a brief interval of tranquility, very conducive, under the blessing of God, to its growth and strength. The seeds of the Gospel, which had been scattered far and wide by the late per-

secution, and which had taken root in many a soul, now sprung up under the genial influence of the milder sky, and the refreshing showers of divine grace, and yielded such rich and abundant fruit that the wilderness and the solitary place rejoiced, and the desert bloomed and blossomed as the rose. "Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified ; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."* How wisely and how mercifully does the Lord attemper the seasons to his spiritual as well as his natural field, and cause the vernal breeze and the gladdening sunbeam, and the fertilizing rain, to succeed fierce blasts and frowning, wintry skies !

During this period of delightful peace, the Apostle Peter was engaged, as was just mentioned, in what might be called an Apostolic visitation of the surrounding Churches. "It came to pass, as Peter went throughout all quarters," or rather all Churches, "he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." That these visits of the Apostle, and his brethren were doubtless similarly engaged in different parts of the field of Christ, were very gratifying, comforting and edifying to the Christians there, we scarce can doubt. The

* Acts ix. 31.

coming among them of a servant of the Lord, for whose station in the Church and personal character, they entertained the highest regard ; who could speak with authority ; confirm the testimony, and strengthen the hands of the resident pastors ; administer to the baptized converts that imposition of hands which we noticed in the account of the visit to Samaria ; and generally counsel, instruct and exhort both ministers and people, must have been, even irrespective of the miraculous endowments of the Apostles, hailed with much joy, and have produced most beneficial results. This is the principle, brethren, of Episcopal supervision. And supposing even that it is not so sanctioned and recommended by Scripture as to make it obligatory upon the conscience, what can Christians gain by discarding this primitive example ? The difference we admit to be a great one between the Apostles, and those unworthy servants of God who have succeeded to a part of their responsible trust : but so is the difference great between the first evangelists and pastors, between such deacons as Stephen and Philip, and later laborers in the same field. While fully granting the vast difference between the inspired master-builders and overseers of the Church, and all who have come after, is it not the wisest and safest course to adhere to the principles upon which their labors were conducted, and conform

to the pattern which is left on record in the Book of God? Are we likely to improve on their model, and while we may find much imperfection to censure, and many defects to lament, in each order of the ministry; is there not at the same time reason to hope that a moderate, faithful, affectionate, paternal oversight and supervision of the different portions of the Church of Christ, accompanied with such a progress among the Churches as is here recorded, will not be without some blessing of God, and conduce to the edification, stability and improvement of the whole body? That some such system is needful and expedient, we may fairly infer from the fact that when there is no lawful and recognized authority to which it is entrusted, it is often exercised by self-constituted visitors and voluntary overseers.

This journey of the Apostle was marked by the performance of two astonishing miracles. The subject of the first, was a resident of the city of Lydda, "named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy." All hope of recovery had been probably long since given up by himself and his friends. To this helpless and afflicted man, the tidings of Messiah's advent had been indeed good news. Expecting, perhaps, no bodily relief, he had found spiritual peace and consolation from the discovery of the grace of Christ. The sense of redeeming love

and divine mercy now soothed the weary days, and long, sleepless nights of his protracted confinement. A prospect of that better land, whereof the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick, reconciled him to the present trials and privations of his supposed incurable disease. With great desire, we may believe, did he desire to behold the Apostle of his Lord, whose fame had so often reached him, and much edification and comfort did he anticipate from the interview. But it was to bring him another blessing that he scarce dared to hope for. As the Apostle approaches the couch of the afflicted man, he accompanies his salutation of peace with the cheering words, "Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole : Arise, and make thy bed." What music to the ears of the decrepid and helpless sufferer ! He listens with a devout, believing heart. He attempts the exertion of which he knew himself, a moment before, incapable. And newly-infused vigor accompanies the effort, and the bed-ridden paralytic rises immediately, full of energy, and performs the appointed task. Oh, if they who are tied and bound by the fetters of sin, who want all strength for holy duties, all capacity for spiritual exercises, would but hearken with like faith to the message of Christ ! If, when it is said unto them, "Seek ye my face," their hearts would but answer, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek!" if, instead of

pleading inability, they would set themselves at once to obey ! divine grace would burst asunder their bonds, and inspire them with life and strength. If the servants of the Lord proclaim in your ear, " Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," it will be entirely imputable to your own unbelief and refusal to improve his grace, if you are not made whole.

The effect of this miracle was great. " All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord." The man himself was generally known, the hopeless and incurable nature of his disease was notorious, and few there were that could resist this evidence of the truth of the Gospel. The success of the religion of Christ here was the more important and beneficial, because Lydda was a noted seat of Jewish learning, schools being established there of much reputation. Now, a better knowledge than ever was taught there before, animated these seminaries. Both teachers and pupils at Lydda, gladly sat at Jesus' feet, and listened to his divine teachings ; and the fertile vale of Sharon bloomed, as it were, with new beauties, when the glad tidings of salvation pervaded its hamlets and blessed its cottages. He was now known, and loved, and worshipped in that delightful region, who is indeed " the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

From his encouraging and successful labors at Lydda, the Apostle is sent for to visit the house

of mourning. The minister of Christ, to whom is committed a charge of any extent, is never long without such a summons. Whatever else may occupy him, he must expect to be soon interrupted by a message from the chamber of sickness, or from the bed of death. Our people will not all repent at our preaching, but all must die. In this case, it was the decease of an exemplary Christian that occasioned the summons. "There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which, by interpretation, is called Dorcas; this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom, when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them."

We know not with what views the disciples at Joppa sent this pressing message to Peter. Some suppose that it was with the hope and expectation that he would raise the corpse again to life. If so, great must have been their faith, for although Christ had restored the dead to life, no such marvel had yet been wrought by his Apostles. It might have been, however, that without venturing to hope for such an exhibition of divine power, they greatly desired in their circumstances of dis-

tress, the Apostle's presence, and looked for a special blessing on his ministrations, at a time when all hearts were so solemnized and softened. The summons was readily and promptly obeyed. "Then Peter arose, and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him, weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them."

What more desirable tribute over the cold, pallid corpse, than the warm, gushing tears of the poor that have been befriended; of the suffering that have been relieved; of the afflicted that have been comforted; of the ignorant that have been taught the things which accompany salvation. There lay, upon the bier, the mortal part of one who had not lived in vain. The hands, now paralyzed, had been unwearied in providing for the wants of the indigent. The feet, now motionless, had never tired in journeys to the sick and suffering. Her's had not been the barren philanthropy that talks much and does little; that says to the cold and famishing, "Be ye warmed and filled, and yet gives them not the things that are useful for the body." She had been adorned with that most precious grace of true charity, the charity that vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, but watches for occasions of doing good, and responds with generous

sympathy to another's woe. Her humble, unobtrusive beneficence coveted no human praise, but it could not be hid. "When the ear heard her, then it blessed her; and when the eye saw her, it gave witness unto her. The blessing of them that were ready to perish came upon her, and she caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." It is one of the blessed fruits of true Christianity, that it inspires this spirit of unwearied, ungrudging, disinterested kindness; raises up in its track these affectionate, faithful, sympathizing friends of the poor and suffering; especially among that sex which is by nature more compassionate and tender, which has more leisure for deeds of charity, and more ready access to the homes, the hearts and the confidence of the children of sorrow. True Christian faith and love are the spring of this patient, unrequited benevolence. Such unselfish, persevering labors are not the fruit of a self-righteous trust in the good works wrought, and of a claim of merit and reward therefrom, but of the love of Christ, constraining the redeemed and pardoned soul to cast its willing tribute at Jesus' feet. Dorcas was "*a disciple*;" one who had not only the name, but the spirit of Christ. She was pledged by no vows, except those of her baptismal dedication, to the Lord. She was attached to no sisterhood. No trumpet was blown before her to attract admiration and applause. Her heart's de-

sire and prayer was to glorify Christ, and to minister unto him in his afflicted people. Where there is the heart of Christian sympathy and benevolence, there is little difficulty about the way of exercising it. "The poor we have always with us." Objects of distress abound on every side. And the meek, unpretending member of Christ, who is known in many an abode of poverty and destitution; whose presence lights up, with unwonted cheerfulness, the forlorn garret or obscure cellar where indigence crouches; who is little noticed by the world, but whom the all-seeing eye observes ministering to the suffering body and the wounded spirit; who reads the holy Scriptures to the untaught invalid, and prays beside the bed of the desolate and the dying; such an one, (and God be thanked that such there are,) is in very truth engaged in angels' work, a partaker in labors with the ministering spirits of heaven, a daughter of the Lord God Almighty, one who shall shine a bright jewel in Immanuel's crown, when kings and conquerors are forever forgotten, or consigned to shame and everlasting contempt. Upon such an one God put unexpected honor in the miracle wrought at Joppa. How different this funeral scene had Dorcas been one whose whole heart had been engaged in selfish pursuits and worldly enjoyments; had her solicitude and her labors been not to clothe the poor,

but to adorn her own person ; had vanity and ostentation been her ruling motives, instead of benevolence and faith ! What a contrast between her life, a blessing to so many ; and her death, so truly lamented, a bitter grief to all but herself ; and the end of such an one as the Apostle refers to when he says, “ She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.” What revolting mockery would be rich apparel and glittering ornaments upon the livid corpse ? While the good works of a Dorcas follow her even to the coffin and the tomb, aye to the very throne of judgment, on which he that sitteth will say, “ Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it *unto me*.”

The Apostle Peter, obeying the impulses of the Spirit of God, applies himself to the performance of a miracle that shall surpass any that hath been wrought by the Apostles, since the Saviour’s ascension. The weeping mourners are removed from the upper room, and Peter remains alone with the body of the saint. How full of solemnity and intense interest this moment, both to the waiting disciples without, and to the Apostle within ! There lies before him the unbreathing form, fast locked in its dreamless slumber. Almost, we think, must a feeling of regret have thrilled his soul at the thought of disturbing that peaceful repose, and calling back the released spirit .

to the trials and conflicts of this troublous world. But it is for the glory of God, and the spread of the Gospel, and the salvation of many, that this faithful disciple, who had once seemed to finish her course with joy, should return to earth again. And although we hear nothing more of her after-life, doubtless it was spent like the years preceding, in the same works of faith and labors of love, so that she went at last to a fuller reward, a more glorious treasure and a brighter crown.

By the side of the insensible clay, just ready to be consigned to kindred dust, the Apostle kneels, and pours forth the prayer of mighty, prevailing faith. And then, turning to the body, he exclaims, with unhesitating confidence, "Tabitha, arise." And to the words, although addressed to the dull, cold ear of death, there is instant response. The eyes that had been fast sealed, re-open; the soul, sent back by him to whom all souls belong, to its former tabernacle, looks through its windows at the man of God bending over her; she rises up, and sustained by his hand, is restored in full life to the amazed assembly. And now what interchange of cordial greetings; what melting and overflowing of all hearts; what tears of joy, chasing away the tears of sorrow; what ejaculations of praise; what fervent thanksgivings; what hymns of holy rapture! And, if this were so, as surely it was, although death

would so soon part them again, what will be the measure of exultation, what the joy unspeakable and full of glory, at the resurrection of the just, when a mightier voice than that of Peter shall gather the whole company of the general assembly and Church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven; when there shall be meetings of those long severed, no more to part; when the night of heaviness shall have forever fled, and the morn of joy shall break forth with a brightness that shall never be dimmed, and a glory that shall never fade? "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS.

ACTS X. 33.

"Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Never had it been the privilege of the Apostle Peter, to testify the Gospel of Christ to a more attentive and serious audience, than that which was gathered to meet him in the house of Cornelius, the Roman. The deepest interest pervaded the assembly, and expectation was raised to the highest pitch. Every ear and every heart were open. Not a single listless auditor, or unconcerned spectator there. To hear the tidings of the great salvation, was to them a new thing, and a great thing. They felt the solemnity of their position as gathered before God; as about to be addressed by his ambassador, on the momentous interests of the soul. They hearkened to the Gospel with a full purpose of obedience, only anxious to know the way of life, that they may pursue it; eager, as soon as the door of the kingdom should be opened, to press into it. They felt, indeed, that they were receiving a message from the Almighty, and that, with the right recep-

tion of that message, was connected their eternal happiness. What a privilege to the minister of Christ to address such an auditory! And what a contrast between that serious and anxious company, and many a congregation since assembled, ostensibly for the same object!

And most affecting and interesting was this occasion to the Apostle Peter, for other considerations, besides the manifest and reverential attention of his hearers. Not even at Pentecost, did he stand up to preach the Gospel, with deeper emotion. For the first time, was Christ now to be proclaimed to the Gentiles. For the first time, they that had been hitherto aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, were to be invited to the Saviour of lost men. "The mystery," as it is often called, or hitherto secret purpose of God, "to make the Gentiles fellow-heirs, and partakers of the promise by Christ," had not yet been fully unfolded. Jewish prejudice and bigotry were loud in their denunciations, and bitter in their opposition to the extension of the blessings of Messiah's kingdom to the Gentiles. And the Apostles were all Jews, trained up in the same school of national pride and religious bigotry, and had much to unlearn ere they could appreciate the enlarged benevolence and expansive spirit of the Gospel. It was slowly and gradually that the light broke in upon

them, and they were enabled to enter into the fullness of redeeming grace, and labor heartily and zealously for the conversion of the hitherto despised and outcast Gentiles.

In the choice of the Apostle Peter to begin this great and glorious work of evangelizing the heathen, we must observe the second remarkable accomplishment of the Saviour's promise, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The first great fulfillment of these words was, when at Pentecost, Peter proclaimed a risen Saviour to his countrymen, the seed of Abraham, and thus opened to them the door of the kingdom. Now he was selected to open the same door to the Gentiles. His hearers were the first Gentile congregation, the first fruits of the vast harvest that Christ would gather out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue. The work then auspiciously began, has never yet ceased; and never will cease, until a converted world bows the knee to Jesus. Multitudes that no man can number, of every nation under heaven, have followed, and shall continue to follow in the steps of these earliest Gentile converts. Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall the Saviour be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and his God shall be his strength. "And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give

thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." *

The opening of his kingdom, who died for an apostate world, to the Gentile as well as the Jew, seems to us so fit, reasonable, accordant with the benevolence of God and the testimony of Scripture, that we wonder that a spirit so contracted and bigoted as was then displayed, should have existed. And so, in a better and brighter age of the Christian Church, it will be a subject of astonishment, that, in the present day, there should have existed any opposition or indifference to the work of missions among the heathen, or any indisposition to extend the blessings of the Gospel to every creature. The spirit of bigotry, the desire to monopolize the privileges of Christianity, indifference or aversion to the communication of its blessings to every class of society, and every kindred of the earth, are peculiar to no age. The Apostles and early Christians shared them, until they better learned from Christ the nature of his holy religion, free, as the vital air and gladdening sunbeam, to all who have inherited from Adam sin and death.

With much emotion, therefore, we may well suppose, did the Apostle Peter enter upon this new, and yet untilled field of evangelic labor.

* Is. xl ix. 6.

But the way had been made so plain to him, by direct revelation from God, that not a single doubt embarrassed his undertaking. The Lord, by a wonderful combination of visions, had prepared the way for this herald of Christ.

The individual, chosen out of the Gentile world, to be the first recipient of this grace, claims, on many accounts, our attention. Well has he been styled "the Abraham of our calling," holding, as the predecessor of the Gentile converts, a relation to us, not dissimilar to that of Abraham to the Jews. And like him who is called the Father of the Faithful, his character is depicted on the inspired page, as one peculiarly admirable. "There was a certain man in Ceserea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." We may marvel, in reading the account of Cornelius, at the choice of the first Gentile disciple from the military profession, and from the iron soldiery of victorious Rome. We might marvel yet more to read the description of such a man in such a position. How brightly shines the character of this Roman warrior! He is represented to us as "a devout man," a liberal benefactor of the poor, a maintainer, like his prototype Abraham, of family religion, and a man of prayer.

And all this is said of one nurtured in heathenism, trained in a camp, surrounded by a fierce and brutal soldiery, and familiar with the battle-field. Surely, if in such circumstances a Roman centurion could fear and worship God, there can be no force whatever in the excuses we so often hear from men in Christian lands, for their irreligion. Led by the Providence of God, to the land of Palestine, and placed in garrison at the city of Ceserea, Cornelius had enjoyed an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the religion of the Jews. Convinced that Jehovah, the object of their adoration, was the one living and true God, he renounced his national idolatry, and became a proselyte to Judaism. And thus following honestly the light vouchsafed him, and embracing the truth so far as it was made known, he was trained and ripened by divine grace for fuller knowledge, and brighter discoveries. For in God's dispensations it is ever true, "Unto him that hath shall be given." Of the sincerity and conscientiousness of this Roman proselyte, none that knew him could doubt. He was evidently intent upon serving God faithfully, and complying with every precept of the faith which he had adopted.

Cornelius had devoted a day to more than commonly earnest devotion, accompanying his prayers with fasting. And about the ninth hour, when the day was declining, a bright and glorious

vision lightened the solitude of his closet. A man, or a being in human form, but of unearthly dignity and splendor, stood before him in bright clothing. The warrior, who had never feared or shrunk in the day of battle, trembled at the sight of so strange and unexpected an apparition, and could only ejaculate in broken accents, "What is it, Lord?" He receives a reply most encouraging. "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance before God. Send, therefore, to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon, a tanner, by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee."

Let us not fail to observe in this benignant address to the astonished Cornelius, the mention of his prayers and his alms, as having come up together for a memorial before God. This Centurion's religion was not of a one-sided, partial sort. There are some persons who content themselves with acts of devotion, and are apparently devout and prayerful, but whose hands are not freely open to the claims of the Gospel and the necessities of the poor. There are others who consider their liberal benefactions and charities as securing to them the divine favor, and feel that they can safely dispense with religious fervor and devotional duties. But to be acceptable to God, and profitable to ourselves, prayers and alms must go

together, so far as God has given the ability. To be cold-hearted and indifferent to the progress of the Gospel, and the wants of the indigent and suffering, would indicate that we pray to little purpose, since so destitute of the mind that was in Christ Jesus. While on the other hand, our alms and offerings will profit us nothing, except as presented in a spirit of humility and prayer to God. The fervent suppliant retires from the throne of grace, with a feeling heart and a liberal hand. This is part of God's gracious answer to his petitions. The cheerful giver draws near to that throne with a more confiding spirit and a stronger faith. And thus, prayers and alms united, promote the growth of the soul in holiness and love, come up as a memorial before God, and draw down his abundant blessing.

But some at the present day, might be ready to ask, after this description of the character of Cornelius, what need to send to a Christian minister for further instruction ? What lacks he yet ? Why is not such a man good enough and safe enough without hearing the Gospel, and becoming a Christian ? Many there are, doubtless, now, brethren, who would think it wholly superfluous and unnecessary. Many there are now, whose characters would ill bear comparison with that of this devout and benevolent Roman, who consider themselves well enough, and good enough, and safe

enough, without having anything to do with Christ. Many there are, who so far from sending from Ceserea to Joppa, that they might hear a Gospel sermon, will not take the trouble to enter the sanctuary of God, that adjoins to their own dwelling. And yet, these neglecters of a Gospel, brought to their very doors, think themselves entitled to divine favor, and dwell in seeming security. But how different the judgment of Almighty God in this matter! He sends an angel to Cornelius, so upright, exemplary, charitable and devout a man, with the message, "Send to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." So that, in the sight of God, it was of great importance that Cornelius should listen to a Christian preacher, and learn from him what God required. Of such importance was it, that it was worthy enlisting an angel's powers, to bring the teacher and the hearer of Christianity together. Nay, we find the angelic message afterwards repeated in Peter's account of the vision, with a variation of expression that renders the matter infinitely momentous. "Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house *shall be saved.*"* So that salvation hung upon this interview; and Cornelius,

* Acts xi. 13, 14.

with all his moral excellence, and his spirit of devotion, was to be saved through Christ alone. Certainly, here is an exhibition of the Divine will, that ought to startle and awaken from their fatal indifference, the many around us who think it no matter of importance whether a man be a Christian or not; who suppose they can treat Christ's Gospel as they will; that they can attend to it or let it alone at their pleasure; who consider union with the Christian Church as no more important, if, indeed, so much so, as union with a beneficiary society. Very perilous must be this strange apathy to the revealed will of God. Without pretending, or wishing to pronounce upon the manner, in which God will or can extend his mercy to those who are wholly cut off from the knowledge of his truth, it is from this history as clear as noon-day, that where the Gospel is extended, and men may know it, it is the one exclusive way of salvation. And this common spirit of indifference, brethren, this unconcern of men to whom God's richest gift is extended, as to whether they embrace it or not, is a sad, a distressing, an appalling thing. There is reason to shudder, and to tremble, and to weep for these careless multitudes who are going down to the grave, and the dark eternity beyond, under so great a delusion. They may say, "Peace, peace, but there is no peace." Christ himself hath uttered it, the

faithful and the true witness, "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." And sooner shall earth and heaven pass away, than one jot or one tittle of his words shall fail. Oh, we are tempted to wish for a thunder-peal to awaken these deluded slumberers from their fatal dreams, or for an angel from heaven, or for a lost spirit from hell, to be sent to warn them. But God hath given them his word: and hath said, "It is enough." "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

The Lord showed his favor towards Cornelius, not by saving him without the Gospel, on account of his good deeds, but by sending him the Gospel. The reward of his conscientious obedience, was the opportunity to hear of a Saviour's grace and the invitation to Jesus. God so favorably regards his alms and his prayers, that he will not suffer him to be ignorant of the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. This is the manner of God's dealing: this the divine estimate of the riches of Christ: this the boon from heaven, *to be invited* to the cleansing fountain of Immanuel's blood. Oh, how strange and how sad the unbelief, and hardness of heart, and indifference to the things eternal, that wholly annul to such multi-

tudes within the sound of the Gospel, its incalculable preciousness.

The same great Disposer of events, Head over all things to his Church, who, by the angelic vision, was preparing the first Gentile converts to welcome the Gospel, was, by another supernatural vision, preparing his Apostle to preach to them that Gospel. On the day after the appearance to Cornelius, while his messengers are approaching their place of destination, "Peter went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour." The flat roofs of the eastern houses were often used as the places of religious retirement. A trance came over the Apostle during his devotions ; and a vision appeared to him of the opened heavens, "and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet, knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth : wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat." But such a command was entirely repugnant to the feelings of the Apostle, educated in strict conformity to the Law, and taught to observe the Mosaic distinction between the animals that were classed as clean and unclean. He accordingly responds : " Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time :

What God hath cleansed that call not thou common. This was done thrice ; and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now, while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there." Thus was the explanation ready of the vision. The Providence of God, as it so often does, interpreted his word and his will. They that look in a spirit of humble dependence for divine direction will be oft enabled to perceive the guiding pillar ; and the ear that is obediently open to divine behests will hear a voice behind it, saying : "This is the way, walk thou in it."

The strangers at the gate were unaccustomed visitors. One of them wears the armor of a Roman soldier. And the first emotion of the inmates of the house might have been one of alarm, in those days of oppression and violence. But their errand is soon explained—a strange errand, indeed. A Roman centurion, sending for an Apostle of Christ, to come unto him with pressing urgency ! The Spirit intimated to Peter that he should immediately comply with the call. And indeed, without such intimation, he would scarce have hesitated. For what objection could his

Jewish prejudices start, that would not be at once and sufficiently answered by the vision that he had just witnessed. There he was taught that the restrictions of Judaism, which had been divinely intended, and had for ages served as a barrier between God's chosen people and the heathen, were now to be done away. The partition wall was to be broken down. The burdensome yoke of the ceremonial law was to be taken from off the neck. The outcast and despised Gentiles were to be brought into the kingdom. God had appointed to cleanse and hallow, what Israel had so long counted common and unclean. Henceforth there should be one fold under one shepherd. In Christ Jesus there should be no longer Jew or Gentile, male or female, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but Christ should be all, and in all.

Cheerfully, therefore, and with praise to God, the Apostle complies with the invitation, and sets forth with the messengers of Cornelius, towards Ceserea. His approach was eagerly anticipated. "And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." Transported with joy at the sight of the expected ambassador from God, the Roman officer, accustomed to receive the most deferential tokens of obedience and respect, is in a moment himself prostrate before the Apostle. A strange sight! A centurion of the Italian band at the feet of a poor

Jew! But Peter endured not for a moment such reverential obeisance, in itself unseemly to be rendered to a mortal, and so liable to abuse. He instantly raises Cornelius, saying, "Stand up; I myself also am a man."

We have had very frequent occasion, in reviewing this Apostle's life, to notice the wonderful contrast in every respect, of his doctrine and deportment, with those of his pretended successors, the Bishops of Rome. And on this occasion, his prompt and unqualified rejection of the homage tendered him by Cornelius, is in marked and manifest opposition to that high-vaulting ambition and excess of pride, which not only receives the lowliest prostrations as its due, which hath often placed the Pontifical foot upon the neck of princes and sovereigns, which extends it for the salutation of the kneeling devotee, but which even permits and receives complacently, titles and ascriptions that belong to God alone.

A few words suffice for mutual explanations, and rehearsal of those divine manifestations that had been the means of bringing together the present assembly. And then the Apostle, after recognizing his God as no respecter of persons, but as graciously regarding those in every nation who fear Him, and work righteousness; (a blessed truth, of which his present mission to the Gentiles was bright and conclusive evidence,) ad-

dresses himself to his work as an Evangelist. He testifies with plainness and brevity the mission, manner of life, miracles, crucifixion and rising from the dead of the Lord Jesus. He declares him to be the appointed Judge of quick and dead, and announces the great and glorious doctrine of "remission of sins" to all who truly believe in him. The words of Peter are heard, as the Gospel ought to be heard by dying sinners. They are received as summer showers by the parched and thirsty earth. They are truly good news from a far country —grace superabounding where sin hath abounded—glad tidings of great joy—liberty to the captive—life from the dead. And as the Apostle enlarges upon the delightful theme, the Spirit of God attests the word which he delivers, and crowns the work. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." The Spirit came upon them, not only in his softening, sanctifying, sealing influences upon the soul, but in those obvious and miraculous gifts, to which we find in the New Testament such frequent reference. Pentecost was renewed, and these first fruits of the Gentiles shared in those tokens of the Spirit's power, which had been before vouchsafed to their Jewish brethren. To those of the circumcision who had accompanied Peter thither, it was a subject of great astonishment, that on the Gentiles

also should be poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. They had now to learn the freeness of God's mercies to all mankind. But the evidence of the blessing was not to be gainsayed. "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." And thus were gathered into Christ's garner the first sheaves of the great Gentile harvest.

It may be well, before leaving this narrative, to observe how utterly inconsistent it is with the notion that the only baptism, that should continue in the Christian Church, is the baptism of the Spirit, without the use of the element of water or any external sign. Such an idea has not the least Scriptural foundation. And had we only the present passage before us, how could we hesitate to deny it? Cornelius and his friends were baptized with the Holy Ghost, during the preaching of Peter. And so far from the Apostle thence concluding that they needed no other baptism, it is the very argument which he uses why they should be forthwith baptized with water. Who could forbid water, when the Spirit had already come down upon them? And, yet, this opinion would forbid water, because the Spirit had been vouch-

safed. When will men be satisfied to learn humbly from God ?

The Holy Ghost crowned Peter's labors, on this memorable day, with his extraordinary and miraculous gifts. Those he no longer vouchsafes to men. But there are still more precious influences of the Spirit, pledged to accompany the truth as it is in Jesus, unto the world's end. And through those influences it is that the Gospel is alway made the power of God unto salvation to them that believe. From the promise of those saving influences it is alone that we testify with hope and encouragement the word of Christ. Rob us of this promise, and our hands hang down ; our tongue falters. We also trust to "preach the Gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." But, oh, beloved, to cherish and secure this precious bestowment, it needs that you hear the word as these Gentiles at Ceserea heard it. The same earnest expectation of a blessing ; the same anxiety to know the will of God ; the same solicitude for eternal life ; the same willingness to close in with the offers of mercy ; like attention, seriousness and reverence, will not fail of like result. Upon such of our hearers the Holy Spirit will come down as upon Cornelius and his friends ; and though he impart to them no gifts of miracles and tongues ; yet will he melt them into penitence ; arouse them to exertion ; draw them

to the Saviour of the lost, and fill them with joy and peace in believing. And why, brethren, can it not be so? Is the Gospel less precious, the interests of the soul less momentous, damnation less fearful, heaven less desirable to you than to them? Oh, then, receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. God grant that unto you it may prove a savor of life unto life.

THE MARVELLOUS DELIVERANCE.

ACTS. XII. 6, 7.

"And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell from off his hands."

The persecution of the Church by the Jewish priests and rulers would seem to have ceased, or greatly slackened, after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. But this was by no means owing to any relenting of spirit, or diminution of hostility. On the contrary, the same rancor towards the crucified Jesus and his adherents inflamed their breasts, and burned as fiercely as ever. And when an unscrupulous tyrant was anxious to secure popular favor, no surer method presented itself than to oppress and persecute the Christian community. Herod Agrippa, grandson of that Herod the Great who had sought the life of the infant Saviour, nephew of Herod the Tetrarch by whom John the Baptist had been beheaded, and brother of the infamous Herodias, the instigator of that act of cru-

elty, was now the ruler of Judea : high in favor with the Roman Emperor Claudius, and lately promoted by him to regal dignity. He is described in history as a great zealot for the Mosaic law, and much inclined to gratify and court the influential Jews ; and thus he became a ready and willing instrument of their implacable hatred against Christianity. To such a man persecution was a pastime, and the shedding of innocent blood an act of policy. And he thought to accomplish his purpose of exterminating Christianity most effectually, by striking down first the most distinguished and eminent of the body, the chosen Apostles of the Lord. The importance of their labors and lives was well understood, both by friend and foe, and it was the maxim upon which persecutors acted for many centuries in their warfare against the truth of Jesus, "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." As the tallest trees of the forest attract the lightning, and are oftenest shivered by the bolt; so for a long period pertained to the overseers of the flock of Christ the honorable distinction of being chosen out for the slaughter. And this well known fact is a powerful answer to those who would represent, as the growth of human ambition, the primitive form of Church government, which it has already occurred us to notice, and of which the Episcopal character, as early as the second cen-

tury, is not denied. Surely there was little to excite the desire for pre-eminence, when the sword was ready drawn to smite the occupier of so perilous a position, and the faggot kindled to consume the acknowledged Governor of the Church. That would have been a strange ambition that sought preferment at the cost of liberty and life, and was willing to bleed and to burn for the sake of a little brief authority. Truly pious men would never have lent themselves to the projects of ambition and self-aggrandizement, and hypocrites would scarce have coveted an office of so brief and precarious a tenure, and so obnoxious to the watchful eye of persecuting rage. And therefore we may consider the existence of that warfare against the chief pastors of the Church, which Herod Agrippa now began, as furnishing a conclusive reply to such insinuations.

"Now about that time, Herod the King stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." "It pleased the Jews!" What a disposition must that be which delights in witnessing acts of injustice and cruelty, and is gratified at crimes committed by others, which it has not itself the courage or opportunity to perpetrate? Who was most guilty in the sight of God of the blood of this just

man? Herod, at whose command it was shed, or the leading Jews who so applauded and enjoyed the tragedy? It will be no shield, indeed, to men in authority, that popular prejudice or madness encouraged them to wicked acts. But the approvers and favorers of such acts share before God in the guilt. To connive at sin, to delight in the sin of others, is to make it our own. It is an evidence that we are hindered from the same conduct, not by conscience, but by circumstances. How much will the unpardoned sinner have to answer for in the way of other men's sins, to which his heart has secretly consented, or which his tongue hath openly approved?

The first of the Apostolic band who sealed his fidelity to the Lord Jesus with his blood, was James the Greater, the brother of John. There is comparatively little recorded of him in the New Testament, but Herod's selection of this Apostle as his first victim is evidence that his name was prominent among his brethren, and that his labors had been signally blessed. It would appear as if the death of this eminent servant of Christ were sudden, as well as bloody. There is an abruptness, so to speak, in the narrative: "He killed James the brother of John with the sword;" cut him off at a stroke, without notice or warning. For there is no mention, as in Peter's case, of the prayers of God's Church rising heavenward in his

behalf, during the interval between his apprehension and his execution. And we thence may conclude that there was no time for such intercession, the first intimation of that Apostle's danger being the tidings of his violent death. And how different are God's ways from our ways! Of how much importance would appear to the Church at this juncture the life of such a man as James? Yet he is permitted to be cut off. And while the comparatively humble and unknown Tabitha is wonderfully restored from death to life, no such miracle brings back one of the chiefest of the Apostles to his evangelic labors.

Herod found himself not mistaken in supposing that this atrocity would be acceptable to the Jews, and encouraged by the evident favor with which it was received, he proceeded to seize another intended victim. No Apostle was better known at Jerusalem than Peter. None, we may suppose, except it were the converted Saul, was more obnoxious to the Jewish rulers. The enemies of Christianity regarded him as its foremost champion, a standard bearer of the host, one whose boldness and energy, zeal and fervor, ready eloquence and miraculous gifts made him exceedingly respected and admired by the people. To cut him off would be, they supposed, indeed a blow to the infant Church. With general gratulation, therefore, is the intelligence welcomed by the

priests and Pharisees, that this dreaded champion of the new sect is in custody ; that his death is determined ; and the hated sect of the Nazarenes are to lose this powerful leader. Greatly do they triumph in the anticipation of such a blow. No longer shall the voice of this fearless preacher of Jesus be lifted up like a trumpet. No longer shall admiring crowds gather round him to listen to his forcible appeals, and witness his astonishing miracles. Let one after another of the leaders of these sectaries be cut off; let Peter, above all, fall under the edge of the sword, and their confidence is strong in the utter prostration and defeat of the cause of Jesus.

It seemed expedient to Herod to postpone the execution of his prisoner until after the celebration of the Passover, and every precaution, that jealous vigilance could devise, was employed for his safe-keeping. "Then were the days of unleavened bread. And when Herod had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him ; (i. e., four bodies of four each); intending after Easter, (the Paschal feast), to bring him forth to the people. Peter, therefore, was kept in prison ; but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." Herod had no need to multiply his guards, and surround the prison with his soldiers. There is no disposition or de-

sign on the part of the Christians at Jerusalem, to attempt a forcible rescue of their brother. The weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, aye, and to the opening of prison doors. Little does Herod understand from what quarter the danger comes, and what instrumentality is at work to defeat his deep-laid plans. Were he informed that the fellow-disciples of Peter were engaged together in fervent prayer for the Apostle's preservation, he would only have scoffed at the tidings. That supplications uttered by the despised Nazarenes, in their upper room, could interfere with his purposes, and set at naught all his precautions, would have seemed to him an idea most absurd. But there, though Herod knew it not, was the power at work that should unlock the prison doors, and baffle the armed keepers. Oh, the mighty efficacy of earnest believing prayer! "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." While Herod was plotting death to Apostles, and Jewish enmity exulting in the anticipated downfall of the Church, while dungeon doors were locked and barred, and mail-clad warriors were keeping watch and ward over the fettered prisoner, the Church was praying. Christians were besieging the throne of grace with fervent entreaties. And

which cause was strongest the event speedily declared.

But let us not omit to notice that this very spirit of prayer and supplication was from God. He who purposed to deliver his servant out of the hand of his enemies, stirred up his people first to ask for this deliverance. The earnestness and faith, wherewith the disciples of the Lord Jesus importuned for this mercy, were themselves the beginning of the mercy. God's blessings to his Church are preceded by prayer, for prayer is part of the very blessing. The heart to ask is the pledge of successful asking. It is a token for good when the soul is enlarged in prayer, grows fervent and urgent, and exclaims, with the wrestling Israel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Of what countless blessings are we defrauded, brethren, by an unbelieving, prayerless heart? "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss." Unconverted men often express regret that they are without hope in Christ. Christians lament their imperfections, omissions, evil tempers, unprofitableness. Parents mourn over the irreligion of their children, and near friends over the ungodliness of those most dear. But is not God accessible to the petition that gushes warm and earnest from the anxious, believing heart? Is he not ready and

willing to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think? Why are we not more intent on seeking, at his mercy-seat, what we feel that we so greatly need? Can we say that we have faithfully, perseveringly tried this mean of obtaining our heart's desire, and found it to fail?

The expression here used respecting the supplications of God's people, "Prayer was made without ceasing," implies great intensity and fervor. It is the same word which is applied to the Saviour's prayer at Gethsemane. "And being in agony, he prayed *more earnestly.*" The Church prayed for Peter now, in the spirit of Christ himself, wrestling in his agony in the garden. We could not have more forcibly presented to us the depth and intenseness of their supplications. And thus was spent the brief season of delay between Peter's apprehension, and the time appointed for his bloody death. Whatever Herod intended by this delay, (probably he was influenced by his scruples concerning the profanation of the feast, by shedding blood,) God intended thereby to give his people the opportunity of pleading before his throne for their endangered brother, and crying mightily unto him for help; that the blessing might be so much the sweeter and more precious as an answer to prayer.

But time passes on, and no arm is outstretched

to save the Apostle, and now hath come the last night destined for him by his persecutors. It is the manner of God to wait until expectation is ready to fail. Isaac was not only bound upon the wood, but his father's arm is raised to smite, ere the voice from heaven arrests the blow. Pharaoh is permitted to pursue retreating Israel into the very midst of the Red Sea, ere the returning billows overwhelm his host. Jesus is not only crucified, but buried; the stone rolled to the door; and the sepulchre sealed and guarded; ere occurs the stupendous marvel of the resurrection. And so it will be when, as the end draws near, scoffers are proudly asking, "Where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?" that the sign of the Son of Man will blaze in the opened heavens, and "the Lord himself will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."

In the present case, according to human judgment, Peter's hours are numbered. The morrow's sun, as Herod and all Jerusalem, excepting the supplicating disciples, suppose, shall dawn on the spectacle of his execution. He himself probably expects nothing else than to follow his brethren, Stephen and James, in the blood-stained path of martyrdom; a path sanctified also and made dear by his Saviour's foot-prints. "And when Herod would have

brought him forth, the same night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains ; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.” “Peter was *sleeping*.” His brethren were wakeful, spending the watches of the night in outpourings of prayer. The guards were on their watch, redoubling their vigilance as the time draws near. Herod himself, and the expecting scribes and priests, were perhaps kept awake by unquiet passions, and hatred gloating over its anticipated triumph. But the object of all this commotion, the man reserved for the scaffold or the cross, is sleeping calmly and peacefully. Doubtless he had spent much of his captivity in prayer and communion with God. But now, having commended himself, soul and body, to the Keeper of Israel who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, satisfied to glorify God either by life or death as He may see good, undisturbed by anxieties, unterrified by fears, spite even of the fetters which chain him by each arm to a soldier at his side, Peter sleeps. “Thou wilt keep him,” says the prophet, “in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.” What an image of that blessed security which is the lot of God’s children, Peter slumbering in his dungeon, on the eve of his expected martyrdom! No terrific visions haunt his repose. No gleaming sword flashes in dreams of the night before his eye, or gushing stream of purple blood

thrills him with horror. He sleeps, as one safe in the secret place of the Almighty, secure in His pavilion.

If our real condition here, beloved, be truly apprehended, it is only the pardoned disciple of Christ who can lie down calmly and peacefully to rest. Unforgiven sinner, how can you sleep securely when, ere the morrow dawn, you may wake in eternity—wake in torment and despair? How can you place without anxiety and alarm upon your bed the form, that when the sun again bursts from the east, may be motionless in death? Is it for you to sleep, who know not what shall be on the morrow? whose sins are not blotted out! whose soul is unprepared to meet God! whom this very night may usher into the unearthly prison and the chains of darkness! But if Peter's hope be yours, and Peter's Saviour be your rock and refuge, then you may repose peacefully and undisturbed even in the time of danger and impending death, for who or what can harm you? Even to die would be gain, and to be near the inevitable hour is to be near the kingdom of glory.

But Peter's slumbers are interrupted in a way that himself and his keepers little expected. "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals: and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee and follow me. And he went out, and followed him, and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city ; which opened to them of his own accord ; and they went out, and passed on through one street ; and forthwith the angel departed from him." This deeply interesting narrative of the manner of the Apostle's deliverance presents us with a most impressive picture of the benevolence and of the power of the angels of God. It is a scriptural truth, highly consolatory and animating, that those exalted and holy beings are employed by God in our behalf. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation ?" The most obscure and humble of God's children are the objects of their kind protection, and affectionate solicitude. And often they act as the Christian's unknown and unsuspected friends and guardians. But this ministration in the ordinary Providence of God is made undiscernible to us, and probably for this among other reasons, lest the sight of their glory, and the knowledge of their offices of love, should attract to them that homage, adoration and trust, which to divert from the Su-

preme God is idolatry and dreadful sin. But under the miraculous system which ushered in and confirmed the revelations of God's will to men, angelic agency was occasionally made visible ; and the spirits of light were exhibited as God's messengers to his people, and as their deliverers in the time of extremity and danger. Thus appeared suddenly in the cell of Peter, one of the shining ones that are wont to stand before the throne. The gloomy dungeon is illumined with his celestial glory, the chains fall loosened from the Apostle's hands, and while the slumbering Peter himself is roused and wakened, a sleep more profound than that of nature settles upon the unconscious sentinels. The Apostle, scarce knowing what he does, obeys the directions of his heavenly visitant, and follows him forth. The ponderous iron gates of the prison swing open spontaneously ; the watchmen, without as well as within, are overtaken with slumber ; and speedily the Apostle finds himself alone in the silent streets of Jerusalem. It accords well with the simple and truthful tenor of the narrative that we read, "He wist not that it was true which was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision." No wonder that he could scarce persuade himself that an event so strange was indeed reality. No wonder that it was doubtful to his mind whether he waked or slept. Sometimes there is a state of mind not unlike this, on occasion of remarkable

Providential deliverances, or of the soul's escape from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. "Is it so indeed," the pardoned sinner is sometimes ready to exclaim, "that I, who was dead, am alive again? Can I really credit that I have passed from death unto life; that my sins are blotted out; that there remaineth no more condemnation; that I can look up to God as my reconciled Father, and to Christ as my own, my accepted Saviour? Does there really open before my ransomed soul this delightful vista of years to come spent in the happy service of my God, and beyond, an unending and glorious eternity? What mercy undeserved to me a sinner! Can such joyful assurance be true? Can such confidence be other than a dream?" Exceeding great blessings, from their very greatness and preciousness, thus often seem incredible, and from our very solicitude that they should be true, we almost fear to believe them. But God's benefits are so real, that soon every doubt will be dispelled, and the soul be enabled confidingly and joyfully to rest in its goodly portion. Peter soon perceives the truth of his deliverance. "And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

While a company of Christians are engaged in

that earnest prayer which we have spoken of in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, there is heard a knocking at the outer gate. Such a summons, at this hour of the night, and at this time of persecution, was fitted to alarm them. Might it not be the satellites of Herod seeking for fresh victims? Soon the damsel that kept the door, having recognised the well-known voice of Peter, returns without having opened it, to announce the glad tidings. But her words seem those of a lunatic, rather than of a sane person. They had been praying, probably, for Peter's deliverance, and yet could not credit that it had been really effected. The great and wondrous character of the mercy affects them, as it at first did Peter himself. But when the porteress persisted in the assertion, they said, "It is his angel :" that is, his spirit appearing, to announce to us, that he is no more of earth. Their impression, it would seem, was, that the Apostle had been dispatched in the prison, as John Baptist before him ; and that the disembodied spirit, wearing the semblance of the body in which it had dwelt, had come as a messenger of the event. This was a Jewish notion ; and, of course, their supposing such a thing, in the agitation of the moment, is not to be made an argument of its being permitted in God's Providence,

But all doubt was soon dispelled by the

Apostle's admission into the astonished and delighted company. Here was truly a speedy and merciful answer following prayer. Here was strikingly fulfilled the words of the prophet—"It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." What joy now fills each soul, and what praise bursts from every lip! But the Apostle feels it now a duty to preserve that life which God, by His unexpected mercy, hath rescued from the jaws of destruction; and he is compelled to shorten the gratulations of the interview. "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go, show these things unto James, and to the brethren:" (the special mention of James the Less being on account of his office as Diocesan of the Church at Jerusalem :) "And he departed, and went into another place."

The tidings of the morrow were as joyful and comforting to the Christians of the holy city, as they were vexatious and tormenting to the tyrant and his abettors. The deliverance of God's people, and the destruction of his adversaries, ever go hand in hand. When Christ triumphs, his enemies are made his footstool. The wrath of Herod burns fiercely at the disappointment, and vents itself upon the poor instruments of his op-

pression. "When Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death." He would not seem to give the least credence to the miracle, whether in his heart he believed it or not; and they who had been the ready, and it may be willing executioners of his cruel edicts, fall themselves under his wrath, and meet the doom which they were preparing to inflict. But Herod himself is dealt with by a higher than mortal sovereign, and soon perishes in a manner far more miserable. "Upon a set day, arrayed in royal apparel, he sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied." Such was the issue of persecution of Jesus' Church. Behold Peter walking at liberty! See the scaffold stained by the blood of those who should have led him thither! And the tyrant himself, arrested in his career of persecution, filled with intolerable anguish, and made the food of the worm while life yet lingers in his tortured body! "So must all thine enemies perish, O Lord. But let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.

ACTS XV. 5, 6.

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter."

For the space of some five or six years after the wonderful deliverance of the Apostle Peter from the dungeon of Herod, we find no mention of him in the Book of the Acts. After his release from the prison, he probably remained for a time in concealment, until the tyrant, being removed from earth by the fearful judgment of the Almighty, the storm of persecution ceased. Tradition, often building on the sand, has attempted to fill this interval by a visit of the Apostle to Rome, and occupies him there with the foundation of the Roman Church, and the erection of that Pontifical see that was to rule the Christian world with a rod of iron. That Peter might at some time have visited the imperial city, and perhaps suffered martyrdom there, is a point which, however doubtful, and unsatisfactorily proved, I have no particular anxiety to deny. The rejector of the usurpations of the Popedom may very cheer-

fully admit the fact, if fact it be. It really makes very little difference in the scale of controversy. Peter might be conceded to have been there a hundred times, and still the advocate of Papal supremacy is not one whit nearer the establishment of his case. But while I am not solicitous to deny that Peter might have at some time visited that city, and might have died there, there is no evidence whatever for transporting him to Rome at this particular period. Nay, there is much evidence to the contrary, especially the important fact, that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, makes not the least reference to his brother Apostle, as the founder of their Church, or as in any degree connected with it. Total silence on such a point is hardly to be explained, as the Epistle was written some time after the Apostle's pretended visit, if there were any reality in the claim. Neither does it accord with St. Paul's statement in the Epistle to the Galatians, that all the Apostles plainly perceived that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto him, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter. "For," he adds, "he that wrought effectually in Peter to the Apostleship of the Circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles." This could scarcely have been their conclusion, if the Apostle Peter had already laid the foundation of the Christian Church in the great metropolis of

the Gentile world, and, together with the fixing there of his Episcopal seat, exercised an undisputed sovereignty over the whole flock of Christ. It is evident that his labors were mainly among his own countrymen, and that when absent from Jerusalem, he was chiefly occupied in preaching Christ to his dispersed brethren, the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bythinia, to whom his first Epistle is addressed. And there is every reason to suppose that he was thus engaged, sowing the precious seed of the kingdom, during the interval of which we have spoken.

We next read of him as present on the memorable occasion which had convened the Apostles and many of the brethren at Jerusalem, to settle a question that was then greatly agitating the Church. The part which he took in the proceedings of that assembly is, on more than one account, deserving of our attention. To understand it, we must briefly revert to the origin of this controversy.

Among the churches embracing Gentile converts, Antioch was at that period the most noted and considerable. The Christian community in that city was the most numerous and prosperous of any beyond the bounds of Judea, and greatly had it been favored in the residence there, for a considerable time, of some of the most eminent of the Apostles and other teachers of the Church.

From thence the first foreign missionaries were publicly and solemnly sent forth, and Paul and Barnabas had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. There is every reason to suppose that the growth, piety and holy joy of this Church kept pace with its abundant privileges. But how exposed is the tranquillity of the Church of Jesus to be interrupted by restless passions and unholy attempts—sometimes by the arts of the ambitious and hypocritical, and sometimes by the unscriptural doctrines and unwarrantable practices of sincere and honest, but deluded men? The root of bitterness springs up readily, even in the soil where Apostolic hands have planted and watered. The peaceful church of Antioch was thrown into sad confusion by certain self-commissioned intruders, who came down thither from Jerusalem, intent upon imposing on the converted Gentiles the burden of the Jewish ceremonial law. “And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” These men had professedly embraced the Gospel, but they had no just conception of its completeness and preciousness. They retained their old Jewish leaven of Pharisaical reliance upon the Mosaic ritual. They seemed to think the simple Gospel an insufficient foundation of the eternal hopes of

men, and would render it stronger and broader, by incorporating with it the institutions of Judaism. Probably they argued thus: "By this plan you certainly must add greatly to the stability of your hope. You have Christ and his Gospel, as you had before; and then you have besides the law of Moses to rest upon, so that thus assurance is rendered doubly sure." This is a mode of arguing, brethren, that has always proved specious and attractive to some minds; the idea that the Gospel is made better, safer, stronger by some additional incorporations. This disposition has sometimes sought to improve it, by multiplying ceremonies, and exalting them to a level with the truth of God: sometimes to corroborate the foundation of the sinner's hope by human merits and virtues, and to represent our justification as not being effected through faith on our part, but through faith and good works combined. And it is sometimes urged as a sufficient answer to objections to such schemes, "Why you have the work of Christ as before. We do not take that away. We are merely adding thereto."

Now let the person who is disposed to listen to such suggestions read with attention St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. This very question it is which the Apostle there considers; this very snare it is against which he warns. And how loudly, earnestly, emphatically does he warn! We cannot

study that Epistle, and consider it then so immaterial whether men make their additions to Christ's Gospel or not. Thus does he exhort those who were inclined to submit to this assumption, and make themselves, as they fancied, safer, by adding circumcision to faith, as necessary to salvation. "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."* Surely here is language that should startle those who would add to the foundation which God hath laid in Zion, and think thus to make it firmer. No, brethren, Christ is a sufficient Saviour, able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him; and Christ, moreover, is an exclusive Saviour. To him belongs all the glory of every soul saved from death, and his glory will he not give unto another. There can be no partnership of the Saviour with the sinner, of Christ with the Church, of God with man. The relier upon forms and ceremonies must choose between his observances, and the Lord Jesus, as the ground of his confidence. He cannot stand upon both. The self-righteous man must take either his own good

* Gal. v. 1, 2, 4.

works, or the cross, as his plea before the Judge. He cannot piece out one with the other. For what is this attempt to add to the work of Christ, but unbelief in the value and efficacy of that work? Christ is not enough for the man. He must have something more to rest upon. And thus doing, he virtually deserts the Redeemer. He forsakes the ark. Its shelter seems to him imperfect, and he seeks some other refuge. Whereas living faith takes Christ as "the Lord our righteousness," judges that "we are complete in him," submits indeed with willing obedience to every command of Jesus, enters into covenant with him through his appointed sacraments, gladly receives the appointed pledges of his pardoning mercy, strives to follow the blessed footsteps of his most holy life; faith works by love, works as diligently as if it were working for debt and recompence; but as its reliance for salvation, knows *nothing but Christ*. Neither sacraments, however precious, nor prayers, however indispensable, nor duties, however many and self-denying, nor good works, however acceptable to God. *Nothing but Christ*. "That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." This was the Gospel which St. Paul and his fellow laborers had been preaching in Antioch, to the

great comfort, peace, and edification of the Church. And for this precious doctrine of evangelical faith, these zealots from Judea now attempt to introduce their plan of ceremonial justification. No marvel that the great Apostle decidedly and boldly resisted the pernicious innovation; and that we read in the history, "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

There was, we read, "no small dissension and disputation" among the disciples on this matter. Dissension and disputation in the Church of Christ are much to be regretted, but a silent acquiescence in pernicious and unscriptural doctrines is a far greater evil. We may mourn that the Church is agitated by controversies, but *life*, even with agitation, is better than *death*. Had there been no faithful witnesses for Christ to sound the alarm, when these corruptions of gospel purity were introduced, the enemy would have come in like a flood, and truth would have fallen in the streets. The "truth as it is in Jesus" is the life of immortal souls. It is too precious to be lightly parted with, or supinely resigned to the assailant. If need be, the Christian must "*contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the*

saints." And if driven thus to contend, as Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch, by the attempt to undermine Christ's Gospel under pretence of strengthening it, by substituting another foundation for the simple cross, or another mode of justification than that by faith alone, the whole responsibility of evils that may ensue rests upon the heads of the innovators. They were the troublers of Israel, who then loudly and positively assured the penitent and believing Gentiles, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

It is to this occasion, and to this journey, that the Apostle alludes in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians; and thence we may the better gather his view of the importance of the controversy, and of the character of the men by whom it was originated. "Then fourteen years after, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles; but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren" (or in spite of false brethren), "unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which

we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

These men, therefore, who intruded themselves into this Apostolic Church with so lofty a bearing; who undertook to correct the deficiencies of a Paul and a Barnabas, and to enlighten the darkness of their converts; who insisted upon the believing Gentiles being subjected to the bondage of the whole Jewish ritual, and told them that their faith in the Lord Jesus was insufficient for salvation, were in St. Paul's judgment not true brethren, but *false*, "unawares brought in," and abusing the unsuspecting confidence of their fellow disciples, "to spy out the liberty which they had in Christ Jesus." It might have been enough for the Apostle Paul, by a simple appeal to his own inspiration, and consequent possession of the mind of Christ, to have settled at once, and with authority, this vexatious dispute. But another course was preferable. These innovators had come down from Judea, probably from the Church at Jerusalem, towards which the Gentile Christians looked with great affection and respect, as in a manner their mother Church. They professed to speak in the name of that venerable Church. Their tone was loud and positive. Their pretensions arrogant and likely to impose upon the multitude. They claimed to be the mouth-pieces

of the Church ; its true representatives. With whatever explicitness and conclusive evidence Paul and Barnabas might exhibit the truth of Christ, these persons would probably remain unconvinced, and would insinuate that there was an opposition between their doctrine, and that of the Apostles and the Church at Jerusalem. The most effectual way, therefore, to silence these agitators, and to strip them of their false assumptions, was for the Apostles and brethren to convene and pronounce their united decision. This mode was accordant with divine wisdom, since the Apostle Paul tells us that " he went up by revelation." Upon this errand, therefore, Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem ; and their journey was made a source of edification and comfort to their fellow Christians on the way, by the good tidings which they spread of the wide conversion of the Gentiles. On their arrival, they were received with cordial hospitality by the Church, and the Apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But amid their joyful congratulations, and affectionate interchange of views and feelings, the same note of discord was struck, which had been vibrating with such harsh and dissonant sounds at Antioch. " But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Some of the Pharisees, who had professedly embraced the Gospel, had, it seems, brought in their Pharisaism along with them. Their conversion had not been so thorough and sincere as that of their brother Saul. With him, "old things had passed away and all things had become new," when he discovered the grace of Christ. But their spirit was essentially the same as before. They no longer belonged to the Jewish sect, but they were still Pharisees in heart; zealots for the Mosaic law; putting ceremonies on a level with Christ, and really ignorant of the freeness and completeness of the great salvation. And baptized Pharisaism proved as dangerous and hostile to the Gospel of Jesus, as ever did Jewish Pharisaism to Jesus himself.

For the full hearing and decision of this grave question, "the Apostles and elders came together." And it would also seem from the subsequent expression, "the whole multitude," that the people were also present, and whether or not they participated in the discussion, signified their deliberate approval of the sentence. For the circular letter which was sent forth to the churches was in the name of "the Apostles, and elders, and brethren," thus establishing the right of the people or laity of the Church to be represented in her councils, and to assist in guarding the purity of her faith. It must have been a most interesting assembly.

From different regions were gathered the Apostles and evangelists, the standard-bearers and leaders of the sacramental host. There were to be seen a number of those venerable men, the chosen attendants of our Lord while he was upon earth, who had now for twenty years, since his ascension, been fighting manfully under his banner. Time must have traced its furrows on their brows, and the burden of constant labor and care must have bent their frames; but their hearts were as full of fervor, zeal and love, as when they beheld their risen Saviour on the first memorable Easter. There were many others, who, on their testimony, had believed in a Saviour unseen by the bodily eye. There were laborious missionaries, like Paul and Barnabas, who had travelled many a weary mile to spread abroad the glad tidings of salvation. Men who had never before met face to face, but well known to each other by reputation, and loved as well as known, now first exchanged fraternal greetings. Truly, must such a meeting have presented to the observer a most impressive scene, and have proved to those gathered there, a most affecting and refreshing season, a lively emblem of the blessed assemblage of all God's dispersed children in his kingdom of glory.

In this meeting, we are drawn to the particular consideration of the part taken by the Apostle

Peter, and its history is one of great importance in this respect ; important as well in regard to what the Apostle did *not* do or say, as in regard to what he did. If, according to the pretensions of Rome, Peter were the appointed vicar or representative of Christ on earth, and vested with a pre-eminent authority, and infallibility in the determination of all controversies of faith, this certainly would be the occasion on which these high prerogatives would be exercised. We should expect the inquiry to be simply, "What does Peter think of this matter ? Let him pronounce his infallible judgment. We all bow to it, as to the voice of the Lord himself." Do we find anything of this nature ? Not one syllable. Peter declares his opinion among his brother Apostles, with clearness, but with modesty ; and, after the discussion of the point by the others, the Apostle James sums up, as it were, the debate, in a tone of somewhat more authority.

It is manifest that the president of this assembly, and every assembly requires a presiding officer, was not Peter, but James. This office, involving no permanent superiority, nor conflicting at all with the equality of the Apostles among themselves, but simply temporary and occasional, was probably accorded to him as Bishop of the Church at Jerusalem, the city wherein the Council met. And it has been well remarked, that if

his opening words, "Men and brethren, hearken unto me :" and again, the conclusion of his remarks, "Wherefore, *my sentence* is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God :" had fallen from the mouth of Peter, rather than of James, they would have constituted a far stronger argument for Peter's supremacy, than all besides that is to be found in the New Testament. And if we reflect upon an expression in this speech of James, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world ;" and consider the bearing of this Apostolic Council upon the subsequent usurpation that was to enslave the Church for ages, can we fail to be struck with the divine purpose of leaving, on the inspired page, so conclusive a refutation and disproof of such arrogant claims, of inscribing there with a pen of iron, so total a contradiction to the blasphemous pretensions of the Man of sin ? No marvel that Rome hates and dreads the Bible.

Little, however, did the Apostle Peter dream of the abuse to be afterward made of his name, when he arose to state, in a simple and explicit manner, his own convictions on the subject of dispute. And this he does in the most convincing and unexceptionable way, by relating the dealings of God himself with the Gentiles, and appealing to his brethren present, as to the real ground of

their own trust of salvation. And his influence with the Jews, as pre-eminently the Apostle of the circumcision, must have given great weight to his statements. "And when there had been much disputing," chiefly, we may suppose, on the part of the Pharisaic zealots, "Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago, God made choice among us, that the Gentiles, by my mouth, should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us: and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they."

This was a noble vindication of Gospel truth, and of the sufficiency of faith in Christ unto salvation. Here we recognize the man, who exclaimed to the Lord Jesus in the day of his humiliation, when many forsook him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." And who again hailed him as "The Christ, the Son of the living God." It required greater moral courage for Peter to make this avowal of simple reliance on the Saviour, amid

these sticklers for ceremonial justification, than to meet the sword of Herod. But he is decided and uncompromising in his declarations. Nay, he claims that God hath already settled the matter, and *that* upon the first publication of the Gospel to the Gentiles, when God made choice of him, to unlock the door of the kingdom to Cornelius and his friends, the first fruits of the Gentile harvest. If God had given to them, upon their hearing of the Gospel, his own blessed Spirit; if he had not only vouchsafed to them miraculous endowments, but even still richer blessings of his grace, purifying their hearts by faith; was it for the Church to say that they could not be accepted without conforming to Jewish rites? And while the very brethren to whom he spake, rested their entire hope of salvation upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, was it for them to bind upon Gentile necks this intolerable burden of Levitical ceremonies? Great was, doubtless, the effect on every mind not closed by prejudice and bigotry, of this brief and unanswerable appeal, and the impression was immediately deepened by the statements that followed. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Thus the dealings of God were manifested. The majestic march of the Redeemer, through the con-

verted Gentile nations, was traced to the kindling of adoration and gratitude in every holy breast. And after the closing appeal of the Apostle James to the sacred Scriptures, the lively oracles of Jehovah, there was an immediate and unanimous decision. While the Apostles and their associates embraced this opportunity of warning their Gentile brethren against some sins, of the guilt of which the heathen had very inadequate conceptions: and also for peace sake disapproved of some customs, which, although not morally wrong, were very objectionable to their Jewish brethren: they entirely released the Gentiles from the obligation of the Mosaic law, and exposed the falsehood of those pretensions to Apostolic sanction which had been so boldly made by the Judaizers. The result of this assemblage was the establishment of the truth of Christ, and the promotion of harmony and peace; and so assured were the Council of the divine approval of their decisions, that they felt warranted to say, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us."

Often since hath that holy name been abused to decisions of a very different nature, and claimed by assemblies of a very different stamp. In this Council of inspired Apostles and brethren, there was no vague search after tradition, no vain glorious elevation of Church authority, no exaltation of man. The question with them was simply,

“ What is the will of the Lord ? ” and that will they gather from his holy Word, and from the manifest bestowments of his grace and Holy Spirit. And their decree, if we may so call it, concludes, not with an anathema, as was the fashion in later times, but with a benediction. When the distant Christians, whose minds had been so painfully agitated by the question, listened to its Scriptural and consolatory tenor, “ they rejoiced for the consolation.” And we may rejoice with them. For it was a solemn and conclusive affirmation of the great Gospel principle, that when the hand of faith clasps the Saviour, the sinner is saved ; that by faith we are justified, without the deeds of the Law ; that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love. “ Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.”

THE FAULT AND THE REPROOF.

GALATIANS II. 11.

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

We are drawing towards the close of the eventful and instructive life of the Apostle Peter. After the account of the part which he took in the memorable Apostolic Council at Jerusalem, we find no farther mention of him in the Book of the Acts. The inspired writer of that authentic narrative became thenceforth the companion of St. Paul, and confines himself to the life and labors of that Apostle. Some incidental allusions to St. Peter's subsequent history are contained in the Epistles, which complete such record of his life, as God hath been pleased to comprehend in the sacred Scriptures. To these we may add some few traditional statements worthy of attention; but for the most part memorials of the latter description are too uncertain, confused and contradictory, to be entitled to reliance.

The mention of the Apostle, which occurs in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, is of a nature to affect us with surprise and regret.

His whole course, as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles, has been that of a faithful, fervent and fearless minister of Christ. He appears prominent and unshaken as a champion for the Gospel, cherishing the purest affection for his Lord, and devoting to him soul and body, a living sacrifice. After his recovery from the sad and awful fall into which he was betrayed at the hour of his Master's peril, after the gracious forgiveness extended to him by his risen Saviour, he discovers fresh zeal and renewed energy. He appears anxious to show himself not unmindful of or ungrateful for that wondrous mercy, which had covered his sin, and restored him to the Apostleship. The love of Christ manifestly constrains him. Especially does he seem raised above all considerations of personal danger. He stands forth the undaunted proclaimer of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of persecutors and enemies. He does not hesitate to charge the murderers of the Lord with their enormous crime, and to press upon their consciences the guilt which they had incurred. As we pursue his history, we find him in labors more abundant, honored by his Lord with the keys of his kingdom, first to unlock the door both to the Jews and Gentiles, and performing the most astonishing miracles, "insomuch that the sick were brought into the streets, and laid on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter

passing by, might overshadow some of them." Amid the honor and reputation thus attracted towards him, on the part of his fellow-disciples, we find him humble and self-renouncing, claiming no superiority over his brother Apostles, and consenting to receive no unseemly homage. On the gathering of the Apostles and brethren at Jerusalem, to decide the vexatious disputes that had been excited by the Judaizing members of the Church, the conduct of St. Peter is worthy of all admiration. He gives, without the least pretension, but with entire clearness and decision, his testimony in favor of evangelic truth, and vindicates the freedom of the Gentiles from the burden of Levitical ceremonies. What can we anticipate from so consistent and unwavering a course, but perseverance to the end in the same manly and resolute advocacy of the Gospel? The path of the just hath been shining more and more, and we look for it to brighten into the perfect day without a single cloud or shadow. Pursuing the history of this eminent and honored servant of Christ, we expect nothing but to hear of faith and love triumphing over the infirmities of age and the opposition of the adversary, and investing with heavenly radiance the closing scenes of life. And far, very far, from our thoughts, is any apprehension of such a man varying in the slightest

degree from his steadfast maintenance of the truth of Christ.

But it must have been for wise purposes that the Holy Ghost caused this account, of the Apostle's momentary wavering from the "simplicity and godly sincerity" becoming the Gospel, to be inscribed on the page of Scripture. And, inasmuch, as "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," we cannot feel justified in passing over this incident without comment. The record made of it shows the divine purpose that it should be attentively considered, and warrants us to believe that its consideration will not be without profit and advantage.

One fact, which meets us at the outset, is the truthfulness and impartiality of the Holy Scriptures. Here, as in the account of Peter's denial, we perceive the perfect openness and honesty of the sacred writers. They have no concealments. They disdain all attempts to put a different aspect upon things from what they really should bear. They are above all flattery or extenuation. No matter by whom a fault is committed, even though it be by one whose general character is commended to our esteem and confidence, it is stated without reserve or palliation. Thus, the candid enquirer will be finding continually fresh proofs that the Bible is a book of truth.

It relates facts exactly as they occurred. exhibits characters in their real lineamen living portraiture. We can repose with most implicit confidence upon its every word. Men, left to themselves, could scarcely have failed to give, in some measure, the bias and coloring to their writings. There have been sometimes betrayed an anxiety over the failings or exaggerated the virtues loved and honored. But He, who gave the holy volume, is the God of truth, and He caused the Book that is stamped with his authority to reflect the brightness of this lovely attitude. So far from the relation of the fault or sin of this eminent servant of God making against the character of this volume to divine origin, it is a weighty argument in its favor, establishing the perfect veracity and trustworthiness of this inspired record. Hence is the Bible worthy of most implicit faith and reverence. With much confidence may we repose on its prophecies. With how much awe should we listen to its warnings? And how should we be penetrate by the conviction that the God who gave the law mark all iniquity, and that there can be no concealment or evasion practised with him?

There is also another inference of the importance to be drawn from the narrative

event. Before adverting to it we will turn to the account, as it is given us in the Epistle to the Galatians. The Apostle Paul, after mentioning the journey which he made to Jerusalem, on the occasion of the assembly of his brethren there, thus pursues the subject: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." The fault of the Apostle Peter therefore, on this occasion, was connivance at the attempts of the zealots for Jewish ceremonies to bring the Gen-

ties under this bondage. We should have supposed that the decision of the Council at Jerusalem would have set this question at rest, final and forever. It had there been fully and fairly discussed. The advocates of ceremonial justification had been permitted to bring forward their arguments, and to urge all that could be urged on their side. The assembled Apostles, elders, and brethren had decided the point with entire unanimity, and their decision " seemed good unto the Holy Ghost." The great principle of justification by faith alone in Christ, had been vindicated and established. The Gentiles were taught that Christ was an all-sufficient Saviour, and that they need not, and ought not, to join with trust in him reliance on Jewish rites and ceremonies. After such a conclusion, we should scarce expect to hear again of this controversy. But there is in error strange tenacity of life. Though apparently dead and buried, it will often revive from the tomb. I finds a congenial home in the natural heart of man. It is fostered by the great Adversary of truth. I can assume different shapes and wear divers garbs. And when foiled in one mode of assault, it has ready recourse to another. And the error, which lay at the bottom of this dispute, the substituting another foundation for the crucified Redeemer—the idea that simple faith in Jesus is insufficient to save and justify us ; the putting of rites and ordi

nances, of the means of grace, and of the fruits of faith, on the same level with faith itself; is one that has always evinced singular pertinacity. Against Scriptural forms and articles, and against Scripture itself it has stood out, unwilling to yield to plain statements and unambiguous language, and ever striving to lead the mind away from simple and sole dependence upon Jesus crucified.

In the conduct of Peter, on this occasion, there was also great inconsistency. In the Council of Jerusalem he had stood forth the earnest and successful opposer of the very error that he now countenanced. He had referred to the divine choice of himself to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and to the blessing that attended his labors among them, as the determination of the matter by the Lord himself. If any one therefore wavers in this matter, we should scarcely expect it to be Peter. Surely he who hath spoken so decidedly, as well as acted so boldly, will not be moved from his position. But strange as is the fact, it is none other than Peter himself who is drawn into this compliance, so inexcusable in itself, and so pernicious in its effects. St. Paul does not hesitate to call his conduct by the apparently harsh name of "dissimulation." It was an inexcusable betrayal and compromise of the principles which he had avowed, and to which his own conscience still gave its witness.

And what was the cause of this lamentable inconsistency? "The fear of man," of which the Scripture emphatically remarks, that it "bringeth a snare." He withdrew from that unrestrained fellowship with his Gentile brethren, in which he had before allowed himself, "fearing them which were of the circumcision." While fully convinced that the course of these Jewish zealots was that of Pharisaic bigotry and exclusiveness, rather than of Christian liberty and charity, he countenanced their conduct; and while he thus encouraged their intolerance, he must have occasioned great distress and perplexity to the minds of the Gentile converts.

What a striking example this of the weakness even of the best men if not upheld by divine grace, and of the subtle and ensnaring tendency of undue regard to the opinions of our fellow men! It would have seemed as if Peter must have been raised entirely above the influence of the fear or favor of man. Evidently was he indifferent to the menaces of open enemies. He could stand forth amid the very populace of Jerusalem, who a few days before had clamored for the blood of Jesus, and charge them with the crucifixion of their Messiah. He could confront undismayed the assembled Sanhedrin, and boldly accuse the heads of his nation as the authors and instigators of the same atrocious act. His calmness and confidence

forsook him not in the dungeon of Herod, and he could slumber peacefully on the night preceding his expected martyrdom. No open violence, no array however appalling of the instruments of torture and death, could shake for a moment his constancy. Had he been at this very time required to seal his attachment to his Lord with his blood, he would not have hesitated a moment. But the Apostle, who would not have quailed before the axe or the cross, was in fear of "false brethren." He dreaded their invidious notice and disparaging sneer. He shrank from their accusations of want of loyalty as an Israelite. He was unwilling to be thought less true to his national faith and venerable law; and yielding for a moment to these feelings, he forgat his undivided allegiance to Christ. For a little time, until recalled to duty by the stern and faithful rebuke of his fellow Apostle, he became a prevaricator and dissembler, and rendered questionable his fidelity to his Redeemer, and his zeal for the truth as it is in Jesus.

Now this unexpected halting of St. Peter becomes the more remarkable and instructive, when regarded in connexion with the subsequent history of the Christian Church. And we can scarce doubt that this full record of so humiliating an incident was directed by the Holy Ghost, that it might stand on the inspired page a solemn protest against the future arrogant claims of the advo-

cates of Papal supremacy. For which of the Apostles is thus represented as failing in steadfast maintenance of Gospel truth and sincerity? The very one to whom Christ had declared long before, "Thou art Peter; and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." Upon the true import of these words we have dwelt in a former discourse. But that they cannot be understood in the sense that Rome would put upon them, is undeniably manifest from the passage before us. This promise of Christ, we are told, invested Peter with infallibility. It constituted him supreme head of the Church, and enabled him to decide all controversies respecting the Faith, without possibility of error. The minds of the unstable and unlearned are wrought upon by the specious plea, of the immense advantage of there being always in the Church an unerring judge of doubts and disputes. From this supposed advantage is next argued the certainty of the thing. Such a judge was Peter appointed; and a succession of men after him were to exercise the same amazing powers, and to be vested with the same infallible discrimination between truth and error. Now is not the simple narrative, upon

which we are meditating, sufficient to scatter to the winds these enormous assumptions? Are not these few words enough to overturn, from the very foundation, the towering edifice of Papal usurpation? When the Apostle Paul stood forth in the midst of the Church at Antioch, and "withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed;" when he openly charged him with conniving at insidious error, and compromising the purity and truth of the Gospel by timid and time-serving compliances, did he not really tear away, as with a Samson's might, the very pillars of the Antichristian temple? And whether or not he apprehended the full bearing of the course which he then pursued; or knew that, by inserting the account in his Epistle to the Galatians, he was leaving on record, by anticipation, a protest against the subsequent encroachments of the Man of Sin, doubtless he was governed throughout by the influence of the Holy Ghost. When the question is asked, Where was Protestantism before the days of Luther? we need be at no loss for an answer. Not only did God raise up faithful witnesses to the truth in every age of darkness and apostacy, who resisted even unto blood, striving against sin; but in the Holy Scriptures themselves, we have prophecies the most clear, warnings against future corruptions the most decided, and protests pointed

and direct against the first germs and buddings of error.

There would be naturally great exultation amongst the false brethren, who had come down from Jerusalem to Antioch to bring the Gentiles into bondage, when so eminent and honored an Apostle as Peter gave them the semblance of his countenance. They were probably ready to boast their triumph. But if even a Peter swerve in the least from the straight line of Christian fidelity, the Spirit of God will inspire one of his brethren with boldness to tax him with his fault, and call him back to duty. And God saw fit to leave Peter to himself on this occasion, and to permit him a second time to fall, that there might remain, on the imperishable page of Holy Writ, this abiding refutation of that falsehood, which afterwards assumed a shape so portentous.

And while this record so conclusively disproves the unholy pretensions, of those who call themselves Peter's successors, to infallible security from error, it may also be considered as a caution to the Church of Christ, against reposing undue reliance upon human authority. Between the voice of God himself, addressing us in the inspired Scriptures, and the voice of man, there is a gulf immense and impassable. To attempt to place the opinions of men, no matter how good, and wise, and venerable, of men singly or collectively,

of individuals or the whole Church, upon the same level with Holy Writ, is nought less than treason to our heavenly King. What an illustration may be drawn from this narrative of the futility and danger of seeking for religious truth in the traditions of antiquity, rather than in the Word of Jehovah! Suppose that, instead of the account of this transaction at Antioch being preserved in Scripture, tradition had handed down to us the fact, that the Apostle Peter had, after the date of the Council at Jerusalem, joined the Judaizing party in the Church; and that this compliance of his were made an argument against the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as it is laid down in the Epistles of St. Paul. Here would be a tradition vastly more imposing and trustworthy than many of those which have gained currency and influence. It would be the account of a fact in the history not of one of the Fathers, but of an Apostle, and of a fact having a most intimate and important bearing upon a doctrinal dispute. And yet, where would they be led who should take this authentic Apostolic tradition, however correctly and circumstantially handed down, as their guide in the study of the New Testament? And if a Peter, when not speaking or writing by inspiration, could thus fall, what reliance can we place upon the opinions of our fellow mortals of later ages and far inferior gifts, except as they are

borne out by the plain, unambiguous testimony of the Word of God ?

The conduct of these two great Apostles, on this occasion, is therefore, attentively considered, most fitted to confirm our confidence in the Gospel, and to lead our faith to rest, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. It is a striking instance of the fairness and opennesss with which the affairs of the early Church were conducted. In later times, the questionable arts of concealment and secrecy were introduced. Policy prevailed over candor and honesty, and sought to cover what it was judged inexpedient to make known. But this was not the practice of the Apostolic Church. There every thing was open and above-board. When one Apostle prevaricated, another withstood him to the face. A time-serving prudence would have sought to hide this difference between brethren, and have feared that scandal and reproach to the cause should ensue from a manifest variance between two such champions of the Faith. But truth courts no subterfuge ; and firm in the consciousness of inherent strength and divine support, lays bare every thing to the light of day. If there are divisions in the Church, and differences among brethren, let them be known, fairly met, openly discussed, no matter at what seeming hazard and injury, and the

straightforward course of truth and honesty will prove in the end by far the safest and the best.

While we are struck with the decided, unflinching maintenance of the truth of Christian doctrine by St. Paul on this trying occasion, we may also admire the humility and meekness of Peter, under this severe but deserved rebuke. He seems to have candidly confessed the truth of the charge against him, and to have submitted to the punishment which it brought upon him. We read of no acrimonious reply or irritating dispute. And when he has occasion in his Epistle afterward to refer to his "beloved brother Paul," it is in language of the utmost affection and respect. Thus the Christian meekness and humility of the one Apostle are as conspicuous in owning his fault, as the boldness and fidelity of the other in the rebuke. The character of Peter, after this momentary eclipse, shines forth the brighter, as that of a genuine and faithful follower of the meek and lowly Jesus. And we are constrained to admit, that although the most eminent Christians, when not upheld by God, are but men, frail and erring men, yet they are very different men from the irreligious. The mind that was in Christ is the prevailing character, and there is a "seed remaining in them that are born of God, so that they cannot sin," as others sin. If tempted to sin, they speedily repent. If drawn for a time from the right

way, they soon return. For God is their God, Christ is their Shepherd, the Holy Ghost is their guide to truth and heaven, by whose gentle whisperings they will be won back to the way of life and salvation. "Blessed is he that hath the King of Jacob for his help, and whose trust is in the Lord his God."

THE ANTICIPATED DECEASE.

2 PETER I. 13-15.

"Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance."

The eminent Apostle, by the labors of whose life the Gospel of Christ was so widely diffused, and the Church of the Redeemer so greatly enlarged and edified, was also chosen to be one of the penmen of the New Testament. Thus was he, who instructed so many by his living voice, permitted to teach all generations of Christians by his Epistles. Being dead, he yet speaketh ; speaketh to every congregation of Christ ; speaketh to a multitude innumerable of his fellow-disciples ; exhorts, animates and comforts the hearts of myriads whom he never saw in the flesh.

I purpose now to conclude this series of discourses, with a brief notice of his Epistles, and of the supposed circumstances of his departure from this life.

The Epistles of St. Peter are worthy of his reputation and character, as one of the chiefest of the Apostles. As inspired compositions, indeed, they soar far above all human effort, and their praise is not due to mortal intellect or heart. The stamp of Almighty God is marked and legible upon them. The truth, as it is in Jesus, is set forth with a distinctness, a solemnity, a power and a sweetness, far beyond the reach of man. They constitute an exceedingly weighty and precious portion of Holy Writ, an inestimable treasure to the Church of Christ. But while the Holy Ghost speaks to us in these Epistles, with an utterance not to be mistaken; while we reverently own their unearthly energy and heavenly unction; we also can commune with the chosen vessel who was appointed to indite them. While under a divine and marvellous guidance, the writers of the Scriptures are, at the same time, permitted to express their own sanctified feelings. The Holy Spirit, who hath put good desires into their hearts, and inspired them with fervor, zeal, love of the truth, anxiety for the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of their fellow-men; impels them to pour out these holy emotions, and preserves them from all error in their communications. And thus, while we listen with awe to the voice from Heaven, we are affected with hallowed human sympathies, as addressed also by our brethren.

The first Epistle of St. Peter is directed "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." * The word "*strangers*" is supposed by many to apply to them, as Israelites far from their native land, scattered as foreigners, rather than citizens, through these regions, to whom they conceive St. Peter particularly addressed himself as being the Apostle of the circumcision. By others, who suppose the Gentile as well as the Jewish converts to be embraced, the word is understood spiritually, as applicable to their state as pilgrims and strangers upon the earth, a truth which the Apostle certainly desired to impress upon them. † The Epistle evidently supposes those whom it addressed, to be exposed to the storm of persecution. A large part of it is adapted to such an exigency, and is admirably fitted to strengthen the faith and constancy of struggling and threatened followers of Christ. It enlarges upon the excellency of the Gospel, and the greatness of its blessings, promises and hopes, in a strain of the utmost elevation and power. It presents very affectingly a suffering Saviour to the love and imitation of his people. ‡ It persuades the afflicted and persecuted flock of Jesus, to rejoice even in their tribulation, inasmuch as they were "a chosen genera-

* 1 Peter i. 1.

† 1 Peter ii. 11; iv. 7.

‡ ii. 20-24.

tion, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, called out of darkness into marvellous light ; in time past, not a people, but now the people of God ;" once "as sheep gone astray, but now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls."* By considerations so awakening, he animates them to patient continuance in well doing, and to faithful endurance unto the end. He urges, also, very earnestly, the duties of practical religion, and shows the application of their faith to the various circumstances and relations of life, plainly warning them against the snares and dangers to which they were exposed.† Hence, it is a part of Scripture which the Christian may study with great profit, as a guide in his daily walk and conversation. Not the least striking portion of this instructive Epistle, is its exhibition of the respective duties of pastors and people, and its heart-affecting appeals to the ministers of Christ. Here we are impressed at once with the earnest solemnity which breathes in the exhortation, and with the self-renouncing humility of the speaker. In this faithful and touching admonition, there seems to have been designedly placed on record, by the Holy Spirit, another emphatic protest against the subsequent pretensions of Anti-Christian domination. "The elders which are among

* ii. 9, 10, 25.

† Chaps. iii. iv.

you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed : Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."* How marked the contrast between this affectionate fraternal address, and the tone of letters, decretals and bulls issued by Peter's pretended successors ! The great Apostle, however justly he might insist, like his brother Paul, upon the authority which the Lord had given him for edification, waives the language of authority, and pleads, simply as an elder, with his brethren in the sacred trust of the ministry. Earnestly does he warn them against the influence of low mercenary motives, and against unwarranted assumption of power over God's inheritance. Let them be shepherds, not lords ; let them feed, and not tyrannize over the flock. Let them remember their own accountability to the chief Shepherd, and look for the recompence of their cares and toils in his favor, and at his appearing. In this simple address, how forcibly and

* Chap. v. 1-4.

nobly does the Apostle rebuke by anticipation the spirit of priestly aggrandizement and spiritual despotism, that so soon after unequivocally manifested itself, and gradually increased to a stature so towering, until it crushed the bleeding Church beneath the foot of pride !

And while referring to this decided protest against usurpation and abuse of power, by those commissioned to feed the flock of Christ, let us also note the singular date of this Epistle, wherein it is conceived, we may also discern the pointing of the finger of prophecy. "The Church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you." * Now, we must understand Babylon here, either literally or figuratively. That it was not to be taken literally, was the general voice of antiquity. There is nothing to render it probable that the Apostle ever visited Babylon in Chaldea. The opinion, therefore, was prevalent in the early Church, that Babylon was to be understood mystically of Rome ; and Romish writers themselves, in their anxiety to show that the Apostle visited that metropolis, contend for the same interpretation. Admitting this view then, we have one Scripture argument to prove that Peter was at Rome, but an argument in which Papal Rome has little reason to glory. For the Apostle

* 1 Peter v. 12.

designates the imperial city as the mystic Babylon, like its prototye, to be conspicuous for oppression of the Israel of God ; for idolatry and unhallowed splendor ; and like her too, destined when the hour of retribution came, to a sudden and terrible destruction. And this intimation, connected with the utterance of prophecy in the Apocalypse of St. John, must apply to a nominally Christian, and not an avowedly Pagan authority. If the Apostle Peter, therefore, were at Rome, as the advocates of the Papacy so eagerly maintain, he was there to put upon her the warning prophetic brand of the mystic Babylon.

The second Epistle of St. Peter is, on its face, addressed generally "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us." It confirms the doctrines and instructions of the former, and aims to establish the disciples to whom it was sent in the truth and profession of the Gospel. And it solemnly cautions them against false teachers, who were then busy in disseminating corrupt dogmas, and against profane scoffers, who would mock at the Scriptural annunciation of the coming judgment. It earnestly presses upon Christians advancement in holiness, and shows how needful and important are spiritual growth and improvement, to those who would secure an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of their God and Saviour.* With

* Chap. i. 5-11.

holy zeal the Author calls upon his fellow disciples to "make their calling and election sure," to obtain not a bare admission, but "an abundant entrance" into the promised rest of God's people. And especially is the Epistle remarkable for the clear and solemn re-affirmation of the great truth of the second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Judge of men; and for its awe-inspiring description of the glories and terrors of that day. Adverting to the attempts that would be made by proud and scoffing unbelievers to shake the faith of men in this solemn event; and to the encouragement which the ungodly and atheistical would take, from the lapse of many ages without these warnings being fulfilled, to represent them as wholly groundless and unreal; he makes known the certain arrival of the appointed day of doom in terms of unequalled and appalling solemnity. Penetrated with his amazing and awful theme, the Apostle rises to the utmost height of language, and announces the great crowning manifestation of Omnipotent justice, in tones that thrill the reader's inmost soul. That delay, which so greatly emboldened the wicked, he shows to flow' from the abused longsuffering and mercy of an outraged, yet still compassionate God; but, gracious as it was, to have its limit and termination. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire

against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness ; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night ; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." * How much of power and solemnity in the Apostle's application of this awful subject to the consciences of his brethren ! Let not our ears be dull, nor our hearts insensible. " Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness ; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."

* 2 Peter iii.

The interest of this Epistle is greatly enhanced by the Apostle's reference to the approaching termination of his earthly labors. He wrote in full view, not only of his Master's cross, but of his own, and the light of eternity shone vividly upon his expecting soul. "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance."* The Apostle knew that he must shortly put off his earthly tabernacle, as his Lord had shown him. He refers here to the Saviour's address to him, at the memorable interview on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias, when he was restored to his forfeited Apostleship, and solemnly charged to feed his Master's sheep and lambs. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest

* 2 Peter i. 12-15.

not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me." * "Aye, follow me, Peter, though I lead thee by a rough and toilsome way, to a torturing cross and a bloody death. Follow me, through whatever dangers, difficulties, trials, I may conduct thee. Follow me, though the end of thine earthly pilgrimage be as fearful to flesh and blood as was mine own. Thou hast witnessed my sufferings: arm thyself likewise with the same mind, and prepare to seal thy fidelity with thy blood." And the Apostle, with unfaltering step, followed his Lord, that painful cross, to which each day brought him nearer, full in his view; and although for a moment at Antioch, he so far yielded to the influence of false brethren, as to waver in his maintenance of Gospel truth and sincerity, yet he never, after this intimation from Jesus of the end that awaited him, shrank from danger and violence. And with how much calmness does he, in the passage before us, refer to this anticipated event? His anxiety is manifestly not for himself, but for his brethren in Christ, and the approach of death reminds him not so much of his own sufferings, as of their spiritual dangers and wants.

In our Lord's words, the end of his Apostle's

* John xxi. 18, 19.

life was foretold as crucifixion. "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Once the master of his own motions, and free to go whither he would, he should then be helpless in the power of cruel enemies, his outstretched hands would be nailed to the tree, and he would be subjected to a doom from which frail nature must recoil. But faith and love enabled him to meet this appalling doom without a murmur. He speaks of it simply as the putting off his earthly tabernacle, and looks forward to it as composedly as to a removal from one dwelling to another. And he gives us, immediately after, the secret of his undisturbed peace in such a prospect. "For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty."* An undoubting persuasion of the truth of that Gospel which he preached, a certain assurance of the mighty power and future coming in majesty and judgment, of that Saviour whom his own eyes once beheld transfigured upon the holy mount, nerved him for any extremity, made him indifferent to the cruelty of man and the rage of hell, and filled his soul with glowing anticipation of the glories in which he should share.

* 2 Peter i. 16.

Although we are spared, beloved, the fiery trial of the early believers, and the end of our days is not invested with the additional horrors by which they were menaced, yet is there something not inapplicable, in the Saviour's language to Peter, to the general experience of our mortal lot. "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." The buoyant life and elastic energy of youth must, ere many years have flown, be paralyzed by disease, or benumbed with age; and the hour surely arrives when the strongest frame lies motionless and rigid, unresistingly to be borne by other hands to the place, whither, if choice were given, it would not. What can reconcile the living, the active, the healthful, the joyous, to changes so inevitable and saddening, but faith in that Gospel which is proved, by the blessed experience of the departing Christian, to be no cunningly-devised fable, and hope of meeting in peace the Saviour in whom the heart hath trusted?

The feeling uppermost in the Apostle's heart, in view of his not very distant martyrdom, was solicitude for the spiritual welfare of his brethren in Christ. Over those, for whom, as a faithful shepherd, he had so long watched, his soul yearn-

ed with exceeding anxiety. He forgets his own agonizing death, in his concern for them, and desires to occupy the few remaining days of sojourn in his earthly tabernacle, by putting them in remembrance of the great and saving truths which they had already learned. And he is anxious to leave upon their minds impressions that shall be fresh and vivid, when he is no longer their fellow-pilgrim upon earth. "Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance." The Apostle would soon be separated, by the mysterious curtain of the tomb, from those in whom his heart was so deeply interested. Then he could no longer address them by word or letter. The voice which had affectionately spoken in their ear the glad tidings of salvation, and which like a trumpet had sounded the alarm of approaching judgment, would then be silenced. The hand that now penned these persuasive and edifying Epistles, would be motionless, and forget its cunning. But the pastor was not willing that his beloved flock should so soon forget his counsels. He would not cease to be useful to them, because no longer an inhabitant of this lower world. Being dead, he yet desired to speak. And he found consolation in the thought, that when parted from them by the barrier of the grave, he might still act the part of their counsellor and guide.

There is, in the human breast, a strong desire to be remembered after death. In those who are ignorant of the power of Christ's Gospel, it often shows itself in an inordinate craving of fame, and in self-flattering dreams of posthumous celebrity. But we find the rightful and sanctified direction of this longing, in the Providential purpose that influence shall not cease with life. The mind, full of vast conceptions and far-reaching plans, looks with disappointment upon the narrow limits of this mortal span. It pines for a wider range, a longer duration of its powers, a continuance of its influence upon other minds, after its brief space of temporal being is exhausted. It no sooner seems to be matured, and with its acquired stores, developed energies, and ripened experience, to be really effecting somewhat for the good of others, than in a moment the vital vapor vanishes, and life's flickering candle is extinguished. But this allotment of Divine Providence, is not only vindicated in the fullest manner, by the immortality of man in another sphere, but also in part by the decree, that they who have been laboring for the glory of God, and the good of man, shall not cease to be useful upon earth, when their bodies return to the dust, and their spirits to God who gave them. The sanctified desires of the servants of the Almighty, to benefit those with whom intercourse is no longer possible, shall be realized.

The Apostle Peter, and the doctrines which he taught, and the appeals wherewith he enforced them, should be "had in remembrance after his decease." They are still had in remembrance, and he speaks again to us this day, and reminds us impressively of Christian duties and approaching judgment. He shall continue to testify the same great and precious truths, until those solemn circumstances are realized, of which he spake so clearly, and the day of the Lord, like a thief in the night, bursts upon an amazed and trembling world. And in a lower degree and humbler sphere, the Christian, who is true to his calling, will exert an influence that shall outlive the tomb. The pious friend will not be forgotten by the companion whom he affectionately warned, though the sod be green over his grave. The godly parent may be suddenly snatched from the sweet circle and holy sympathies of home. But looks, and words, and actions of the departed, will live in sweet remembrance. The once familiar voice will whisper in the ear of the child, and the endeared countenance will seem to smile affectionately upon each holy purpose, or reprove by its gaze of sad displeasure the unhallowed desire and forbidden act. The pastor's voice is no longer heard in the house of God where he had been accustomed to minister, or in the chamber of sickness, or beside the bed of death. But if his ob-

ject have been his Master's glory and his peoples' salvation, that people will not cease to be profited when his head is low in the dust. To some, who resisted his living appeals, he may speak more persuasively and successfully from the tomb, and counsels, too lightly regarded while he was in the midst of his flock, may become impressive and awakening after his decease. Let us so live, Christian brethren, that if called to remembrance, after we have travelled the irrevocable path, it may be to the spiritual and eternal good of those who survive us.

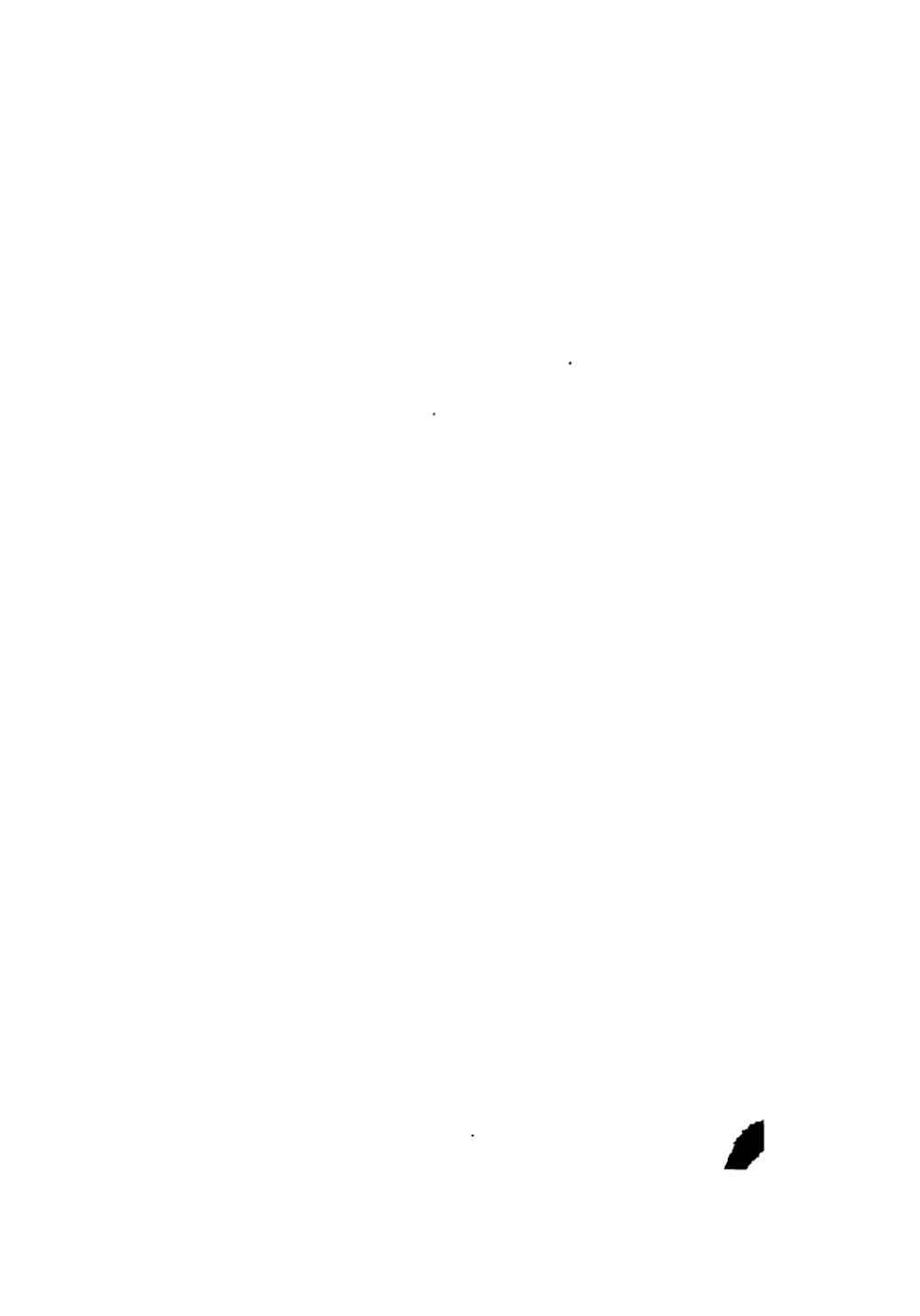
It was, as the Apostle foresaw, very soon after the writing of this Epistle, that he underwent the doom of which his Lord had forewarned him. The place of his martyrdom was by the ancient Church supposed to be that metropolitan city, to which he had himself affixed the name of Babylon. There is a traditional account of his death, which, though wanting in the certainty of authentic history, seems entitled to attention, as harmonizing with his character and life. According to this, he was imprisoned in Rome, together with his brother Apostle, St. Paul, by the sanguinary Nero, who had resolved to sacrifice them both to his cruelty and revenge. While the fatal stroke was daily expected, the Christians in Rome, it is related, importunately solicited St. Peter to make his escape. "This, at first, he rejected, as what

would ill-reflect upon his courage and constancy, but the prayers and tears of the people overcame him and made him yield. Accordingly, having prayed with and taken farewell of the brethren, he got over the prison wall ; and coming to the city gate, he is there said to have met with our Lord, who was just entering into the city. Peter asked him, Lord, whither art thou going ? from whom he received this answer, " To Rome, to be crucified a second time." By which answer Peter apprehended himself to be reproved, and that our Lord meant it of his death that he was to be crucified in his servant. Whereupon he went back to the prison, and delivered himself into the hands of his keepers, showing himself most ready and willing to acquiesce in the will of God. Having saluted his brethren, and taken his last farewell of St. Paul, he was brought out of the prison, and led to the top of the Vatican Mount, near to Tiber. The death to which he was adjudged was crucifixion, as of all others accounted the most shameful, so the most severe and terrible. But he entreated the favor of the officers that he might not be crucified in the ordinary way, but might suffer with his head downwards, affirming that he was unworthy to suffer in the same posture wherein his Lord had suffered before him.*

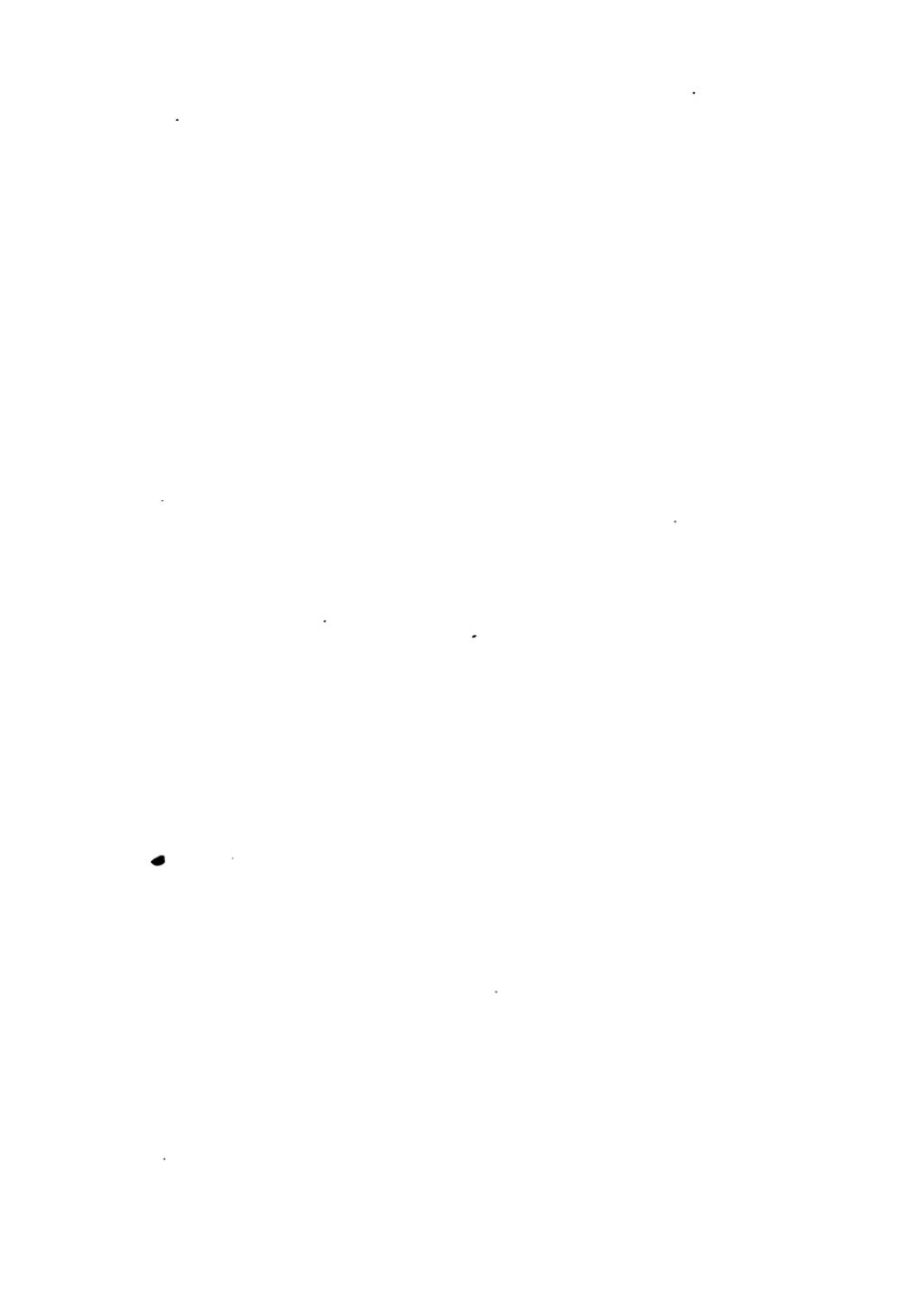
* Cave—Lives of the Apostles.

Under these, or circumstances not very different, took place that decease of the Apostle, which was in his mind when he penned the words of our text. What cause have we for gratitude to the Almighty for his grace manifested in the life and labors of this his servant; so honored in the laying of the foundation and building up of the walls of his Church, and also that so much of his eventful and interesting history has been preserved for our instruction? Let us, therefore, in concluding, "bless God's holy name" for this review of his Apostle's earthly course, as well as for all his other "servants departed this life in his faith and fear, beseeching Him to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them, we may be partakers of his heavenly kingdom; for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen."

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast knit together thine
elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mys-
tical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; grant us
grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous
and godly living, that we may come to those un-
speakable joys, which thou hast prepared for those
who unfeignedly love thee, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. *Amen.*











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